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Postmodernism and Trauma: Four/Fore Plays of Sarah Kane

by

Jolene L Armstrong

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

Department of Comparative Literature, Religion and Film/Media Studies

Edmonton Alberta

Fall 2003.

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October 1, 2003

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Postmodernism and Trauma: Four/Fore plays by Sarah Kane submitted by Jolene L. Armstrong in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

This thesis examines four plays by British playwright Sarah Kane (1971-1999), all written between 1995 and 1999. I examine the chosen plays within the context of the "Cool Britannia," or "In-Yer-Face" London theatre movement of the 1990s. These plays in general, and Kane's specifically, were notorious for their shocking productions, and challenging and offensive subject matter. While I classify her plays as representative of this new wave of playwriting, I also read her plays as different for their critical engagement with violence, trauma and postmodern culture. Although Kane's career was brief, I predict that her plays will continue to influence the shape of contemporary British theatre. Accordingly, this thesis analyzes Kane's plays as products of a long history of theatrical convention and experimentation, rather than trend. Due to their content, I read Kane's plays through an optic of trauma theory, and link the generic state of trauma to postmodern existence that is defined by war, inter-personal violence, repetitive memory, and sex as medium of violence. I invoke Dollimore's perverse dynamic and theory of containment as a way in which to enter Kane's complicated play texts. Kane's plays' unrelenting violence and graphic depictions of sex and violence suggest a relationship with earlier performance theories and practices such as Artaud's theatre of cruelty, and later cultural theories, such as Kroker and Cook's theory of the postmodern as sign of excremental culture, and humanity as an inherently abject state of being. Through a play by play analysis that includes close reading, performance and critical reception, I conclude that Kane's work suggests that violence and trauma are endemic to postmodern

life, and therefore are apocalyptic in their vision, due to their thematic culmination in Kane's final play, the suicide text of *4:49 Psychosis*.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the academic and professional assistance, support, encouragement, and love that the following people gave me during the completion of my degree:

My first acknowledgments are of my committee. Dr. Ted Blodgett, Dr. Jonathan Hart, Dr. Nasrin Rahimieh, Dr. Claudine Potvin, Lee Livingstone, and Dr. Linda Hutcheon have endured my questions, rewrites, fumbles, and finally growth: my deepest gratitude.

Of no less importance has been the tireless, generous, bottomless support of my family. My mother, Beverley Armstrong, has been steadfast, loving and unconditional. She has nourished my hungers, soothed me during my academic growing pains, and eased my fatigue. She has stood beside my every endeavor and has worked her motherly magic. My grandmother, Josephine Dennis, has kept me diligent and honest. It was my greatest hope that she would live to see the completion of my degree; as it turns out her formidable strength and wisdom, and certainly her spirit, may outlive us all. My brother, Brock Skywalker, has taught me that life is large, challenged me when I was thinking too narrowly, and reminded me to have fun; he has been my pillar. My aunt, Loraine Gauld, has kept me grounded to the material world, to the future and the practical. I dedicate this labor to you all.

My Colleagues: Dr. Michael Lahey, Dr. Barb Churchill, Dr. Monique Tschofen, Dr. Marina Allemano, Bev Moore, Dr. Marissa Bortolussi, Dr. David Gay, Joanne Wotypka, Sheena Wilson, Dalbir Sehmby, Jurate Motiejunaite, Irene Sywenky, Colleen Irwin, Janet Ould, Lois Larson-Burton, Jeanette Rousseau. Not a day went by that one of you did not affect me positively, intellectually and practically. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights and laughter, mergers and de-mergers.

And my friends. Jeff Smook, who walked into my life half way through this rocky journey and has remained, patiently, despite the trials, and watched me birth this document, cheering from the sidelines. You have been my music. Anna Arneson, my soul sister, my best friend who has always been there, has always been wise, and has always reminded me of who I am and what is important. I could not have done it without you. And to everyone else who, in his or her own unique and essential way, has contributed to the success of my degree: Martin Rapati, Dr. Tamara Hanoski, Dawn Freeman, Maria Pace-Wynters, Terri Bailey, Lisa Zervakis, Dr. Gina Wong- Wylie, Lucia Chen, Shelley Lawson, Julie Mills, Charles Wood, Kimberly Wright, Joe Bird, the Tansey Family, the

Richardson Family, the Beros Family, Jeremy Weller, Katja Riek, Peter Prohaska, Fluffy, Redbone (RIP), Marc Roy, Sarah Gale, Henriette Lussier, Jolene Lepps, Daniel Lemoine, Lonewalker, Lucy at Paines Plough, and the inebriated soul on the London Underground who explained life and death to me. And, of course, Sarah Kane.

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Chapter One

Introduction

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
> Creeps in this pretty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing. (William Shakespeare *Macbeth* 5.4.1133)

> This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid. (Antonin Artaud *The Theatre and its Double* 122)

This dissertation analyzes four plays by the British playwright Sarah Kane (1971-1999). Her complete works include five plays and one film script. These fours plays are generally understood as representative of the 'in-yer-face' theatre movement that belongs to the more generalized 'Cool Britannia' marketing campaign in the mid 1990s. 'In-yer-face' theatre is identified by its confrontational, provocative and controversial themes, and shocking performance tactics. In this thesis I will argue that in *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Crave* (1998) and *4:48 Psychosis* (2000), Kane figures the postmodern condition as essentially violent and therefore, traumatic. Furthermore, I argue that much of her work presents and enacts a socially problematic conflation of sex and violence in society that engages the construction and demolition of present social realities. In particular, I argue that Kane positions the postmodern concept of a fractured identity and its subsequent contradictory existence in close proximity to the experience of trauma. Kane suggests that postmodernism is a traumatic condition on account of its

inherent violence. Because Kane's work challenges predominant ideologies, by way of introduction I draw upon Dollimore's theories of containment and of the perverse dynamic initially in order to situate the manner in which, through her plays, Kane seeks to expose and destabilize dominant ideologies in her society. [1] However, as predicted by Dollimore's theories, I find that Kane's plays ultimately remain inscribed within those very same dominant ideological prescriptions she wishes to expose and demolish. The horror, that is expressed in her art by the realization that she has arrived at the same point from which she embarked, is enacted within the plays and is a potential source of the trauma; instead of characters discovering an "essential self," liberated from dominant discourses, Kane reveals the power responsible for repression and contamination. Therefore, Kane's body of plays as a whole can be read as a project which seeks to disrupt dominant discursive expectations, a project which, by the end of her career, culminates in the suicide text of *4:48 Psychosis*, the nihilistic and unwitting expression of Dollimore's theory that acts of subversion, in their various manifestations, are doomed to "replicate internally the strategies, structures, and even the values of the dominant" (Dollimore 81). Additionally, throughout her art Kane encourages audiences to question their conception of being.[2] The plays catalogue the possible traumatic experiences that simultaneously portray a society endemically corrupt, and devoid of any moral order. For

---

[1] Here and unless otherwise stated I am referring to Dollimore's definition of ideology as something that "typically fixes meaning naturalizing or eternatizing its prevailing forms by putting them beyond question, and thereby also effacing the contradictions and conflicts of the social domain" (86).

[2] Here I am referring to eliciting an act of questioning the still prevalent Parmenidian notion that "being" is somehow essential, and synonymous with "ultimate reality, substance , prime matter… the Absolute, the One, etc… to Pure Being , Being-in-itself, Being-qua-Being" (Angeles 25).

these reasons I also argue that Kane's works, although generally situated within the 'in-yer-face' movement, stand out as much more radical for their engagement with the treatment of trauma and transgression.

Kane's methods of drawing attention to the traumas that haunt her oeuvre are difficult to watch; they are explicit, provocative, repulsive, and at times theatrically excessive. Arguably, Kane's plays are a postmodern example of Artaud's conception of a theatre of cruelty. Artaud contends that "theatre must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity" and that "the image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than that same crime when actually committed" (85). Containing such elements, a theatre of cruelty should be excessively provocative. This provocation is the correlation that Kane makes between postmodern existence and traumatic experience that I intend to examine in my thesis. As I proceed, I will provide a description of Cool Britannia and a discussion of the way in which I am using the concepts of postmodernism and trauma. Additionally, I will detail the relevance of containment theory and the perverse dynamic to Kane's plays. I will follow this with a history of the critical reception of her work and a brief description of the way in which I shall approach the four plays I have chosen for analysis in each chapter. A brief biography of the author is included in Appendix A.

Circa 1995 a "new wave" of theatre took hold in Britain. This theatrical trend coincided with a larger cultural, economic and political movement in Great Britain. In November 1996, *Newsweek* featured an article entitled "London Reigns," in which the trendiness of London is detailed, thereby announcing the birth of "Cool Britannia" as a means of marketing to North America a renovated British culture. At the heart of

London's presentation to the world as "the coolest city on the planet," (McGuire and Elliott 34), lays the economic state of the country: "The British economy has seen three years of sustained economic growth. And since the Thatcher revolution, the City has consolidated its position as a centre of international finance," the article's authors announce. It is also observed that, at the same time as Britain was experiencing a supposed economic boom "the gap between rich and poor [was] widening" (34-5). It is precisely the contradiction between economic affluence, which can be tracked in the paper trail of London finances, and the ever-increasing number of people living at or below poverty, that following Sierz and others I believe is the catalyst responsible for the "new wave" of 'in-yer-face' plays written by Kane and others during this "boom." Interestingly, this new affluent period in Britain in the 1990's is also "an era of cuts in arts subsidies" (Sierz *In-Yer-Face* 39). It would seem that these funding cuts would effectively hamstring fringe theatres and playwriting cooperatives that emphasize new and experimental work, and that are dependent upon government grants for successful operation and cultivation of new playwrights and directors. However, as Sierz points out, "what mattered more was the cultural climate (39). Sierz cites Ian Rickson, Artistic Director at the Royal Court in 1998, as saying that "'the writers who grew up under the Thatcher regime experienced two things: they were disempowered and simultaneously empowered. On the one hand, the state was strengthened at the expense of the individual; on the other, the only way of achieving anything was to do it yourself'" (39). The general sentiment at the time seems to indicate that the new "DIY culture" is the result of the post-Thatcher climate, which "'provided both a climate of anger and the motivation to do

something about it.'" (39) spawning trend that expressed a more "privatised dissent" than the "left-wing" plays of the seventies and eighties (39).

The timing of Kane's plays, and the correlation between theatre and economy necessitates an investigation of Kane's postmodernity vis-à-vis Jameson's theory that posits postmodernism as an expression of late capitalist/post-industrialist culture. According to Jameson, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism is the observation that "aesthetic production today has become integrated into a commodity production generally" and consequently such a market demands aesthetic innovation and experimentation (316). The result is that artists are increasingly more dependent upon support through foundations and grants in order to produce art. The underbelly of this seemingly utopian attitude toward the cultivation of new art resides in the unwritten dictum that art is then expected to conform to the demands of the granting and funding institutions, a practice which will inevitably dictate what kind of art will be produced rather than providing an environment in which artists might produce according to their own aesthetic rhythms and evolution. Furthermore, as Jameson reminds the reader,

> this whole global, yet American postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror. (316)

The paradox of Kane's art as publicly funded product is that rather than portraying the themes and stories that appeal to a capitalistic audience, they depict society as a psychological, figural and literal gore-fest of excessive behaviour; the plays tend toward

a postmodern parody of late capitalist culture. It might be surmised at this point that the 'in-yer-face' character of this type of theatre is not simply a general backlash against cultural norms, but a calculated assault directed toward the artistic tastes of a capitalist, consumer-driven palate.

'Cool Britannia' and 'in-yer-face' theatre tend to be used interchangeably by theatre critics to describe a mood of theatre in Britain in the 1990's. Aleks Sierz broadly defines 'in-yer-face' theatre as

> any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or what should be shown onstage (*In-Yer-Face* 4).[3]

[3] The question should be posed as to how 'in-yer-face' theatre, with its graphic representations of sex, and sexual violence differs from pornography. Arguably, the difference is not so much in its representation, indeed much of the 'in-yer-face' theatre depicts various sexual activities, but in its uses. Brian McNair forwards and furthers the arguments made by John Ellis, Maurice Peckham, and Bette Gordan that pornography contains a variety of "'codes and conventions,'" that are "'imbued with theoretical and semiotic complexity'" (90). Furthermore, McNair argues that heterosexual pornography is used by men primarily as an instructional device that both instructs and confirms predominant notions of masculinity. McNair concludes this argument, in a general way, by stating that the uses of pornography are many and varied (90-106). Arguably, 'in-yer-face' theatre is used by playwrights as a vehicle for depicting social realities; audience use may vary from those who attend live theatre in order to seek a socially enlightening theatrical experience to those who are more simply avid theatre-goers, and include such voyeuristic desires that viewers of pornography are seeking to fulfil.

As Sierz observes, *The New Oxford English Dictionary* (1998) describes 'in-yer-face' as something that is "aggressive," "provocative," and "impossible to ignore or avoid." Sierz's also notes that the *Collins English Dictionary* adds the word "confrontational" to the definition. Graham Saunders adds the term "new brutalism" to the list of descriptors for the term 'in-yer-face,' which has been aptly appropriated from "American sports journalism during the mid-seventies" (Sierz *In-Yer-Face* 4) to describe this period in theatrical history. Saunders, like Sierz, traces the seeds of the movement of provocative theatre much farther back than the 1990s, to writers such as Osborne and his 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*, and Bond's 1964 play *Saved*. Both Sierz and Saunders agree that it is tempting to position Kane's *Blasted* as the primogenitor of the most recent trend in theatre. However, Saunders posits the 1994 production of Judith Upton's *Ashes and Sand* as providing "signs of what was to come from this new group of writers" (4).

I believe, along with Sierz and others that membership within the Cool Britannia "movement" was more or less mandatory for playwrights producing new or controversial theatre at this time. As Sierz observes,

> in-yer-face theatre is less a school or a movement than a series of networks, in which individuals such as Nielson, Ravenhill and Kane formed temporary milieus. Perhaps the best metaphor for in-yer-face writing is that of an arena, an imaginary place that can be visited or passed through, a spot where a writer can grow up, or where they can return to after other adventures. A few writers have taken possession of this space; others have passed by quickly. But the developments in this arena meant that new writing at the start of the millennium was characterized by a

> variety of dissonant voices and by the breakdown of many of the old divisions that were part of our traditional idea of British theatre: subsidized/commercial; fringe/mainstream; theatre/film; high/low. (*In-Yer-Face* 249).

Nevertheless, I discern from the articles I have reviewed that they attracted much attention at home and abroad for their disturbing content. As has been pointed out by David Edgar, playwright and postgraduate instructor of playwriting at Birmingham University, there is an inherent danger in the current boom, especially as it has been hijacked to promote mainstream tourism to Britain. According to Edgar, the danger can be found in the "'element of fashion--this leads some people to think that last year the in thing was smack, and this year it's sodomy. This can lead to a dangerous mannerism'" (Sierz "In-Yer-Face" 327). Sierz concurs by adding that despite, or in spite of the diversity of new writing since 1956 ("Year Zero of post-war British Theatre" (236)), there was a detectable "element of fashion: one year, theatres would receive dozens of plays about heroin; the next there would be a heap of gangster stories. But despite such copycat dramas, the nineties saw a great liberation of the imagination of British dramatists" (236-7). Nevertheless, heroin chic and heroin lifestyle as portrayed in the film version of *Trainspotting* may have been Edgar's case in point. It is my argument that Kane is more radical than many of her contemporaries, and that she has not, despite accusations to the contrary, contributed to any such imitative fads. If anything, her theatre serves to de-glamorize the trend in which there appears to be a conflation of sex and violence, drugs and social destruction, and an emphasis on violence as a lifestyle in general, by presenting certain of these realities in a stark and grotesque manner. Because

of the importance of reading Kane in relation to the theatre scene of the 1900s, in Chapter Three I will offer a brief comparison of Blasted to Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*.

Kane expressed her own fears of the danger of labelling her and others' work in an interview quoted by Saunders:

> *Blasted* was considered to be the beginning of a movement called 'New Brutalism'. Someone said to a Scottish playwright that you couldn't call his work 'New Writing' because the play wasn't brutal enough. That is exactly the problem with movements, because they are exclusive rather than inclusive.... It is just a media label to refer to some things that might happen in a particular play. Actually it's not very helpful. When people come to see *Crave*, they will be surprised; or they will find that the label doesn't apply. I do not consider myself a New Brutalist. (8)

Still, it is useful to name this period in order to identify a resurgence of theatre that stood apart from mainstream entertainment in its efforts to renew interest in theatre as a social force at a time when arts funding cuts saw independent theatre venues hovering dangerously close to extinction. In my assessment, these "New Brutalist" writers, the "Brit-Pack," the "in-yer-face" *enfants terrible*, were not afraid of writing against the optimistic view of the state of affairs in Britain as portrayed by articles such as the *Newsweek* article cited above, by depicting British society as being in "disarray" (5).

The criticism has often been levelled at the "new wave" of playwrights, that for them, as for postmodern art in general, "politics is not in the foreground" (Sierz "In-Yer-

Face" 327).[4] Similarly, Sierz cites other unnamed sources that level the accusation that "most new work is superficial in its writing, ghettoized in its presentation [,] contemporary plays flatter their audiences rather than engaging with them, and talk to their own 'tribes' rather than to a general constituency" (327). This distinguishes the "new wave" of theatre from earlier "state of the nation" plays. However, I would argue that this is precisely what makes them so political, controversial and provocative; for a playwright such as Kane, the British population is not the homogenous mass posited by the rhetoric and politics of Empire, espoused by magazines that are myopic in the scope of their audience and representation. The term "post-war" is frequently used to describe Kane's (and others') position in British theatre; that the term "post-war" is still used, fifty years after the fact, is disturbing, and yet somehow necessary in order to capture the particular experience of that nation. At the same time it serves to marginalize the variety of experience and origin that now composes the faces of the British population. This generation has no first-hand experience of the Second World War. Accordingly, these playwrights are intensely focussed upon the plight of the individual within a composite society. In spite of the plays' emphasis on individual experience in the world, I am arguing that Kane's plays are more political than they have been given credit for in popular media response. In portraying "a social milieu that's in crisis," (327) her plays are bringing the political to an individual experience. The fact that there is such an influx of new writing during such economically challenging times in the arts, offers an

[4] Here I am referring to critics of postmodernism that assert that the postmodern is nothing but a wildly eclectic irrationalism that expresses cultures as having lost all sense of value (See Jürgen Habermas *Legitimation Crisis* and Christopher Lasch *The Culture of Narcissism*, which I discuss later.).

alternative viewpoint to the type of economics that seems only to value, to quote the title Kane's contemporary Mark Ravenhill's signature play, "Shopping and Fucking."

I see Kane's writing as standing apart from this "movement." Her theatre is a brand of postmodernism that is dystopian and as such, conveys the death of society. The portrayal of this death is manifest in her later plays as also including the death of the notion of the individual within society, as evidenced by Kane's abandonment of concrete character identities in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*. I place Kane's work within a paradigm of dystopian drama because her plays fulfil the requirement of the observation that dystopian literature "offers a militant criticism of specific aberrations in our own present social-political system by pointing out their potentially monstrous consequences in the future" (Gottlieb 13).[5] In addition, Kane's dystopian view of the present and the immediate future echoes Dragan Klaić's theory in *The Plot of the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama*, that

> Dystopian imagination in drama… foresee[s] not only a gloomy future but an end of time as well. A version of the future, imagined as much worse than the present, is out-matched by a prediction of a future denied, terminated, closed--with an end to humanity and the entire living world. (11)

[5] Arguably, a dystopian vision of the universe is ultimately also a form of utopia. Dystopian drama "involves utopian ambitions while describing their total collapse" (Klaić 3). Kane's Hippolytus character exemplifies this notion in his final line of *Phaedra's Love*.

The concept of "an end to humanity" is most clearly evident in Kane's earlier work, *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, and only poignantly so in Kane's later work in which individuals contemplate and enact suicide as the literal "end" of humanity and life.

Coinciding with the dystopian postmodernism of Kane's work is the prevalent display in her plays of the desire to transgress traditional social norms. The enactment of transgression in its various forms in Kane's plays results in the creation of decentred subjects, loosened from the security of ethics, interiority, and subjectivity. Kane's characters' own acts of transgression necessitate an initial approach based on Dollimore's subversion/containment problematic in which the subordinate and dominant sectors of a society frequently exist within a "complex, often violent, sometimes murderous dialectic" (21). However, despite the inherent desire of subordinate members of society to transgress, and the various ways in which this transgression might be enacted, Dollimore asserts and concurs with earlier theorists that such acts of transgression, far from acting against, or in opposition to, the law are in fact the result of what Dollimore nominates as the perverse dynamic, which "denotes certain instabilities and contradictions within dominant structures which exist by virtue of exactly what those structures simultaneously contain and exclude" (33).[6] The implication of this theory in respect to Kane's plays is that, despite her attempts to both escape repressive forces through the inscription of perverse desires in her characters' own acts and to invert the forces that inflict oppression

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[6] While Dollimore's theory is mainly concerned with homosexual experience, Dollimore recognizes that the theory, the subversion containment problematic, and the perverse dynamic can also apply to other groups with interests that run counter to dominant discourses that include race, and sexism in general. Additionally, Dollimore draws upon Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature* in which Williams asserts that "the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture" (Dollimore 83).

upon them, her characters remain either victims of dominant ideology, or become re-inscribed within it.

The most prevalent way in which Kane constructs her characters' attempts to oppose dominant prescriptions is in regard to gender. According to Dollimore, one form of gender resistance to dominant ideology is "sexual dissidence" (21). Sexual dissidence can most pointedly be detected in Kane's plays in the character of Hippolytus and the disembodied voices of *Crave*. Even the concept of disembodiment in *Crave* is arguably a form of sexual dissidence in that the body and mind, so to speak, are presented as separate entities. The mind, or seat of being from which these voices relate their traumatic experiences, generally stems from a sexual experience that has posed certain difficulties for the characters due to the transgressive nature of the experience. There is no previous point of reference from which they might understand their own acts, or the experience of another's act. Furthermore, rather than finding release and relief from the oppressive forces that they are rebelling against, many of the characters are found to be reinscribed within the boundaries of the dominant discourse. While attempts to transgress are likely to result in containment within the dominant hegemonic prescription, Dollimore insists that this is not necessarily failure. As Dollimore says, "resistance from the margins seems doomed to replicate internally the strategies, structures, and even the values of the dominant. Unless, that is, resistance is otherwise, and derives in part from the inevitable incompleteness and surplus of control itself" (81).

Throughout Kane's work I see the frustration of the realization that it is not enough simply to subvert the binary of the dominant/subordinate. Kane's innate sense of the limitations of inversion lead to attempts to pervert the dominant, send it askew, create

a crisis and observe the result. It is Dollimore's identified difference between simply subverting the dynamic, as opposed to "overturning" in the Derridean sense of subversion as being a "necessary stage in [the dominant's] displacement" (65).[7]

I see Kane's plays as morally challenging, featuring shock tactics, in order to question moral norms, presenting themes that repeatedly surface in her work like a recurring nightmare: sexuality, violence, suicide, repetitive memory, trauma and alienation. I intend to demonstrate that, within a paradigm of postmodern trauma, Kane's plays seek to portray contemporary concerns with public and private violence and in particular, sexual violence, war, memory and the way in which those elements function in the traumatic experience of the urban postmodern scene. I believe her oeuvre is an elaborate study of a society in crisis, not unlike earlier theatrical social studies of society in crisis, for instance John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*. Her presentation of the world is bleak and hopeless, yet in her play's persistence and commitment to telling a story, of exposing certain truths, and of demystifying that which we believe can only happen to others, there is the hope of redemption. At the very least, I read in her work a desire for release from a cycle of violence that is perpetuated and maintained by current cultural and economic structures and assumptions, power structures and gender relations. Disturbingly, in Kane's later work, the attainment of release is arguably through suicide, which calls to mind the

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[7] Here, I am referring to Dollimore's citation of Derrida's belief: "'I strongly and repeatedly insist on the necessity of the phase of reversal, which people have perhaps too swiftly attempted to discredit… To neglect this phase of reversal is to forget that the structure of the opposition is one of conflict and subordination and this to pass too swiftly, without gaining any purchase against the former opposition, to a neutralization which in practice leaves things in their former state and deprives one of any way of intervening effectively'" (Dollimore 65).

circular trap that Dollimore describes in *Sexual Dissidence*. That Kane's oeuvre culminates in dramatic and personal suicide provocatively suggests that as a transgressive artist Kane arrived at a point in her intellectual and artistic development in which she faced the realization that "subversion and transgression are not merely defeated by law, but actually produced by law in a complex process of (re)legitimation" (Dollimore 81), and that the "'dominant culture…at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture'" (Williams qtd in Dollimore 83). I believe that within Kane's plays there can be detected the playwright's own growing realization that despite her extraordinary efforts to theatrically expose, deconstruct, transgress and subvert oppressive societal norms, her work was ultimately reinscribed within the very dominant discourse she wished to dis-articulate from. None of her characters attain freedom from the societal restrictions imposed upon them. The only way out for most of her characters is through violent self-destruction, or violently imposed death.

When I declare that Kane's works are postmodern, I am broadly referring to a tendency in Kane's plays to foreground ontological questions of existence, according to Brian McHale's theory of the postmodern in *Postmodernist Fiction*. According to McHale's paradigm, postmodern literature poses ontological questions for its readers such as: "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (McHale 10). I am furthermore reading Kane's ontological concerns as being an extension of existential anxiety over death, suffering, responsibility and alienation. I am also using the word "postmodern" to signify the deconstruction of the concept of unified identity, and delegitimation of prevalent and conventional concepts such as nation, monarchy, religion, sexuality and gender. In addition, I understand and present

postmodernist concerns in Kane's plays as a continuation and elaboration of post-war modernism's uncertainty with being, manifesting in her plays as a hyper-awareness, and the anxiety about the precariousness of being and living within an unpredictable world. Furthermore, Kane's postmodernism can also be read in light of theories that posit postmodernity as an expression of Lasch's rampant individualism of a "culture of narcissism" which has lost all values.

Kane's plays are postmodern in other ways too. Accordingly, I draw upon Arthur Kroker and David Cook's theory of the postmodern as excremental culture in *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*. Of particular relevance through Kane's oeuvre are the concepts of "panic" and their re-assessment of Nietzsche's nihilism and the cancelled self, which argues for a theory of the postmodern that figures violence as its primary feature.

Related to Kroker and Cook's theory of panic bodies and excremental culture is Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection from *Powers of Horror*. Her theory will facilitate a reading of several of Kane's abject characters and scenes including *Blasted*'s Ian, and Cate, *Phaedra's Love*'s Hippolytus, Phaedra, the disembodied voices of *Crave* and the suicidal consciousness in *4:48 Psychosis*. Furthermore, by invoking Kristeva's theory I am also drawing a connection between the postmodern, violent subject and abject state of being in order to demonstrate the extreme connection, even necessary relationship amongst violence, postmodern existence and sexuality as depicted by Kane in her plays.

Later, I draw upon Jeanette Malkin's criteria for identifying postmodernity as described in *Memory Theatre and Postmodern Drama* to describe *Crave* as exhibiting "fragmentation, indeterminacy, reflexivity, intertextuality… temporal conflation,

randomness" with an emphasis on "voice and image, rather than narrative and character" (Malkin 17). The exhibition of features of fragmentation in particular, but also the feeling of randomness, and indeterminacy in Kane's plays serve to reinforce my theory that Kane is representing a society in a crisis of memory that has suffered a "splintering" (Lyotard 72) of subjectivity, knowledge and therefore of existence and being. Malkin's theory provides a tool with which to read fragmentation, and indeterminacy in Kane's plays in a meaningful and socially relevant manner.

Additionally, Kane's drama displays postmodern sensibility in that the plays share Pavis' distrust of "any story, intrigue or plot that is too neatly tied up" (Pavis 48). Again this is true of all of her work. None of her plays present a conclusion. There is no resolution or closure offered, nor do her scripts assist their audiences in making sense of the events contained within each play. If anything Kane's plays often conclude in such a way as to suggest that the dramas have in fact not really ended. For example, at the end of *4:48 Psychosis*, the audience sits in broad daylight with very little clue as to the fate of the character(s) in question. In *Crave*, there is the sinking feeling that the entire process of memory retrieval is doomed to repeat itself, caught as it is within a loop of trauma and memory, without any way of concluding itself.

Finally, I place Kane's oeuvre within a postmodern paradigm, according to Lyotard's conception of postmodernism as that which

> puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that

> which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (81)

The "unpresentable" is the very essence and subject matter of Kane's oeuvre. Using this definition as a basis for understanding the way in which Kane is carving new ground, or extending groundwork that has already been laid, for theatre, I see in Kane's work the desire to push the established boundaries of the very form of live theatre itself. In *Phaedra's Love*, for example, the action is carried out between one unrepresentable yet presented action to the next, perhaps to excessive theatrical effect; however, the play is the playwright's desire to present something unexpected. In *Blasted*, Kane dismantles the expected form of the hotel-room play, by literally "blasting" it into fragments of unpresentables. In *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* the desire to deviate from traditional forms of script, and therefore of play, is clearly evident. Furthermore, in Kane's work can be found little "solace" in that which can be known, or predicted about life. This is not theatre that aims to entertain. Kane is attempting to present Lyotard's postmodern "unpresentable."

Lyotard argues further that in postmodern literature, the characters, and events "always come too late," or "what amounts to the same thing…their realization (*mise en ouevre*) always begins too soon." (81). This notion of beginning too soon, of experiencing something prematurely is, coincidentally or not, similar to the very root cause of trauma as I am using the term, and as defined by Caruth (after Freud) in *Unclaimed Experience*.

The concept of trauma that I work with in my thesis is drawn from the way in which Caruth defines trauma as

> an event that…is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and therefore is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor… so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature--the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance--returns to haunt the survivor later on. (4)

In both Lyotard's theory of the postmodern condition and Caruth's formulation of trauma, the notion of prematurity of experience is definitive. I read Kane as having made an artistic connection between postmodern techniques of representation of traumatic experience, creating a unique genre of a theatre of trauma. Using Caruth's formulation of trauma, I would argue that Kane's plays could be divided into two categories. The first category includes *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, and includes a cataloguing of the possible traumas that can occur, both personal and public. Also within this early work, I detect the artist as grappling with the issue of how best to present trauma in an effective, shocking and, arguably traumatizing manner. The second category includes *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* and deals with the individual's awakening sensation of trauma located, as Caruth suggests, in the individual's inability to process and assimilate cognitively his/her past. While the postmodern condition and experience is not necessarily a traumatic condition, I believe that in her plays, Kane has made a causal bridge between the two concepts.

I choose these four particular plays of Sarah Kane's as a study because I believe that this body of work is deserving of serious scholarly attention, which it has not yet

otherwise received.[8] My work was initiated in order to address this critical blindspot. After reading *Crave,* and later experiencing a performance in August 1999, I knew that I wanted to work on Kane because her writing struck me as pure and uncluttered by superfluous language or decorous emphasis on plot and character: it was pure performance. Since the nakedness of the emotion I witnessed in *Crave* was truly unlike anything I had ever experienced in theatre before, I felt that this particular play, if not her entire oeuvre, should prove a surprising challenge to the conventional history of twentieth-century British theatre.[9] I see her work as refreshing for the state of theatre in general; as Sierz and others have also argued, 'in-yer-face' theatre in general is aimed at attracting a younger generation of theatre-goers. If I were to project an idealized spectator, I would propose that Kane's aesthetic and social objective would create a new demographic of theatre patron. Her plays tend to portray topics that are generally taboo in mainstream theatre, but include the concerns and interests of a subculture or counter-culture, those who live outside of the presumed theatre audience, the dominant class.

Another tendency in Kane's work that I argue is responsible for her rapid success is that rather than moralize about social issues and prescribe answers to the predicaments

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[8] In May 2002 a scholarly volume was published on Sarah Kane entitled *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* by Graham Saunders, lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of the West of England, by Manchester University Press. It is a work that aims to locate "the main dramatic sources and features of her work, as well as centralizing her place with the 'new wave' of emergent British dramatist in the 1990s" (facing cover, Saunders, *Love me or Kill Me*).

[9] Here I understand and define conventional theatre as theatre which does not challenge the audiences' notions of right and wrong, civility and incivility, race, gender and class, and which seeks to affirm a dominant class's position. In a list of such theatre I would include much of the large budget, westend London musicals and other large, "soft seat" offerings.

raised by her plays, her work seeks to expose subtle social mechanisms, predominantly sex and sexuality, all around us that are responsible for postmodern traumatized existence. The playwright does not make a moral judgement; the characters experience the consequences of their actions. At times, her plays invite the audience to partake in a ruthless voyeurism, witnessing acts normally reserved for private situations. Kane conflates the private and personal into a central theatrical event. The result of this conflation is an uncomfortable public theatrical experience.

Drawing upon Cixous, Fortier in *Theory/Theatre* argues that, "theatre is a residual form useful and attractive because it goes against the grain of our technological and simulated culture, promising…an encounter with real time, lived experience and death" (121). By choosing to participate in live theatre, Kane is perhaps expressing, or at the very least, participating in an ancient (residual) form of public expression and ritual and therefore is also expressing a nostalgia for and revival in live theatre's potential for public expression, ritual and performance. I see Kane as having capitalized on live theatre's ability to produce anxiety about life and death, even extending anew the boundaries of that ability within her genre. I believe that Kane chose theatre as her medium because theatre offered the best opportunity for ensuring an emotional reaction from her audiences, whether a favourable or negative response. It is arguable that her work would translate well to the screen, that its proclivity for spectacle possesses an inherent cinematic quality. In fact, Kane did experiment with film, producing a short film, *Skin*, that was met with equally mixed critical reception as her plays. The film deals with racism and sexual violence, but in typical Kane fashion, the film avoids perpetuating the expected victim/perpetrator portrayal of race or sex crime by "blasting" such

expectations. In *Skin*, the expected "victim," a young black woman, violently captures the "racist," turns him into a sex slave and sexually abuses him until he falls in love with her. The result is a complicated and contentious examination of racial and sexual discrimination and violence. Despite Kane's nascent talent for film making, when I imagine her theatrical work in a cinematic format, I see the immediacy and the urgency with which she asks her audiences to respond to her subject matter dissipate, which is an observation that suggests that Kane was acutely sensitive to the specific differences and needs of these two media. Perhaps Kane's allegiance to theatre is a result of film's predisposition toward being easily pre-empted, subverted and contained within dominant discourses, something I believe Kane desperately wanted to subvert.[10] I argue that the live theatrical moment most effectively heightens the effect of her plays' subject matter. The effect of live theatre in many ways mirrors the real life urgency of the issues she stages in her plays because the proximity of their occurrence to the audience is relentlessly disturbing. Kane chose the medium of live theatre not in spite, but because, of its limitations: the way theatre pushes directors and actors to deal with her occasionally unreasonable stage directions in novel, innovative ways. Arguably, because it more easily facilitates effects, film might have succeeded in staging her work in too realistic a manner, drawing attention away from "why" such an event might take place and focussing instead on the effect itself. The theatrical moment forms the essence of the experience of Kane's work, including the after-effects as sudden house lights reveal tear-stained faces, or mouths twisted with disgust, horror, disbelief, and possibly shame. One

[10] I will be discussing Jonathan Dollimore's problematics of containment and subversion at a later point.

could speculate that, in choosing live theatre as her aesthetic vehicle, Kane was relying on the audience's genuine response to that medium. It is still possible to shock people with live theatre. In theatre the boundary between fact and representation remains more ephemeral since real people enact scenes in real time in close proximity to the audience. Certain acts, violence and sex for example, have the potential to effect more impact in a theatrical forum because actors and audience inhabit one space and one moment together. In film, furthermore, the camera selects what the viewer will see; in theatre, the viewer sees everything.

Despite believing that Kane's writing contains important social criticism, I also believe that Kane's notoriety and brief fame are, to a certain extent, due to London's vocal press; therefore an overview of the critical reception of four of Sarah Kane's plays as they occupied the spotlight of London theatre in the mid-nineties is imperative to understanding the effect her plays may have had on the way people watch theatre and on future generations of playwrights. When British theatre critics first made their acquaintance with performances of Kane's plays, the overwhelming majority reacted with horror and disgust at their content. The press reaction, in fact, resembled the violence found within many of her plays. A review in London's daily *Observer*, quoted on the back cover of Kane's collected works, describes her work as "Pure theatre. Or rather, impure theatre: dirty, alarming, and dangerous." I believe that her theatre is viewed as "dirty" because she makes no attempt to conceal the uncivilized, chaotic potential of human behaviour; she does not shy away from presenting humanity at its most abject. Likewise, her work is alarming because the stories she tells are true: stories of rape, abuse, suicide, madness, and corruption that account for the content of

mainstream "news." I think her theatre is viewed as dangerous because once these issues have been experienced, one can never return to complacency or naïveté: they must be confronted.

Due to the explicit nature of productions of her work, each one was a ferment of discussion in the London dailies. Concerns were even raised by some critics as to the artistic and intellectual merit of her work, and its apparent attempt to shock the audience. Without exception, Kane's oeuvre bristled critics and for the most part, inspired vehement attacks levelled at the author and her ability. Kane blames the negative critical reception of her work on the form of her drama, rather than its content, on her "non-naturalistic forms that elude simplistic interpretation" (Stephenson and Langridge 130). A review of the articles and editorials between 1995 and 1999 reveals the general discontent of many critics with the new wave of so called "ecstasy writers" that would become representative of Cool Britannia, the shock-horror dramatists and theatrical *enfants terribles*. Kane was lumped into the same category as many other rising playwrights viewed by many critics as too young to offer work of any note. A case in point is John Gross's comment upon Kane's third play *Cleansed*: "the play is miserable stuff--which is not to say, current fashions being what they are, that I can't foresee Sarah Kane enjoying a successful career" (Gross). It is worth noting that the new wave of writers has been referred to as "fashionable, young--nihilistic urban chic" (Reade). In the articles I reviewed, there was a widespread yearning on the part of critics for a "mythical golden age of artistic brilliance" ("There is"). Clearly many of the critics' own theatrical aesthetics that value modernist traditions and that uphold notions of universal beauty, truth, and authenticity were at odds with Kane's own postmodernity, since modernist

values conflict with postmodern nihilism in Kane's oeuvre.[11] Paradoxically, at the same time, some critics noted that audiences seemed to display "a huge hunger…for theatre that offers a more visceral and participatory experience than is available from the [conventional] play" (Gardner "End"). What many of the reviewers failed to notice in Kane's work was that her violence and invocation of the grotesque is actually a very lucid, if violent and extreme, commentary on postmodernity, including its social accessories: violence, poverty, underemployment, violence, sex and gender roles, urban alienation, and suicide.

The root of the outrage directed at Kane's plays may be located in the reception of her plays, not the issues. As Kane herself speculated, if "*Blasted* had been a piece of social realism, it wouldn't have been so harshly received" (Stephenson and Langridge 130). By problematizing not only the content but also the form of her plays, Kane has called into question the acceptability of what could and should be staged. In this interview Kane stated that she desired "the form and content to be one--the form is the meaning" (130) of her plays. This desire may have caught critics off guard in their expectations of violent theatre. Kane's major concern with the reception of her work was with a misplaced hysteria over the content of her plays. In an interview, quoted by Sierz, Kane made this point: "'The week the play [*Blasted*] opened there was an earthquake in Japan in which thousands of people died, and in this country a fifteen year-old girl had been raped and murdered in a wood, but *Blasted* got more coverage in some newspapers than either of these events. And I'm not only talking about tabloids'" (130). The irony is

[11] Here I am referring to such modernist notions, as detailed by Jameson, which persist in valuing the conception of a unique self and of a innovative, personal and private style of art, which generates its own "unique vision of the world" (6).

obvious. Furthermore Kane's comment suggests that the critics' hostile reception of her work is due to their inability to dwell on the horrors of their immediate reality, in effect making her a scapegoat upon whom they could unleash social outrage for the issues that Kane presents as problematic. The form of her theatre, because it was not blatantly identifiable as social realism, exacerbated the issue of exactly what Kane was trying to achieve in her theatre of brutality.

Kane's own suspicion that her sex might determine the reception of her work appears well-founded.[12] Comments in the press, such as "Kane has proved she can flex her muscles alongside the toughest of men" (Edwards), placed *Blasted*'s debut in a gendered parade of "great" male authors: Bond, Brecht, Brenton, and Pinter. This "male" contextualization stands as evidence that at least part of the theatrical critical community is unable to distance itself from sexism in their evaluation of art. Another critic wrote that "The problem is that this poetry is the poetry of horror, of despair, of excess. Lett's [*Killer Joe*] writing is leavened with humour, he handles his audience expertly.... Kane's version is born of unleavened, almost puritanical moral outrage" (Peter).[13] Several biases are revealed in this assessment. First, the reviewer believes that a female writer of shocking theatre clearly suffers from some sort of hysteria--undoubtedly misplaced moral outrage--and is incapable of staging a calculated theatrical affront analysing the atrocities occurring in the world today. Secondly, this reviewer claims that, to be effective, depictions of horrific events should be leavened with humour so as not to shock the

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[12] For a brief biography of Kane in which this issue and other issues are discussed see Appendix One.

[13] *Killer Joe*, written by Tracy Letts, opened roughly the same time as Kane's *Blasted*, was fairly warmly received, and, significantly, was written by a male.

audience or demand too much of them. That *Blasted* is assaultive, unrelenting in its quest, is viewed as a flaw, a criticism that may have been aimed more directly at the discomfort Kane's gender provoked in this reviewer than the theatrical quality of her work. At least one critic, however, recognized Kane's purpose without referring to her sex or gender: "I came out of the theatre after Sarah Kane's new play feeling bruised to the bone, tight in the stomach and hopeless. I think this is what Kane intended" (Peter).

Even amidst the sceptical, yet warmer reception of *Crave*, one critic could not help but point out that "some of it is pretentious--especially for a young female playwright --Sarah Kane is sticking her neck out again" (Chappell). Apparently the artistic and production risks taken by some male playwrights are not tolerated in a woman's work. In these reviewers' comments, ranging over four years, Kane is repeatedly chastised for treading in men's territory and therefore being a threat to continued male domination in theatre. On occasion, bias in favour of her sex can also be detected, this time on the part of the woman, Mel Kenyon, who would eventually become her agent. "'[O]nly a woman could have written a play [*Blasted*] that understood violence so profoundly, from the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator, without glamorising it'" (Hattenstone 31). In many ways Kane staged herself according to the prevalent literary gender politics of London's theatrical scene by refusing to offer commentary on her work and by refusing to take a gendered stance as a playwright. For a writer that was reputedly a part of the 'in-yer-face' trend of theatre, her personal politics were markedly not in anyone's face, even if her plays' politics were.

Kane's friends and colleagues were suspicious of the media's reaction to Kane's work for the sexist reasons suggested above. Friend and playwright David Grieg stated

that "Kane's friends believe the [media] outrage was feigned. 'There had been a show called *Penetrator* the previous year by Anthony Neilson, and that contained just as much sex and violence as *Blasted*... but the point is that *Blasted* was written by a woman, a young woman at that, and its central portrayal was a middle-aged journalist in all his weaknesses'" (Hattenstone 31). I have no doubt that Kane was acutely aware that her work was being judged on sexist grounds and felt the repercussions as theatrical reviews turned into personal attacks upon her moral character, gender and her sexual orientation.

In reaction to previous critical assaults, Kane first presented *Crave* under the pseudonym "Marie Kelvedon." Vicki Featherstone, who directed *Crave*, offered this comment on Kane's adopting a pseudonym: "'In one way she thought it was funny. Marie was her middle name, Kelvedon was a town near where she was born. But, in another way, it was deadly serious. She spent a lot of time shaking off the negative effects of *Blasted*. She really wanted to write something that could be judged for what it was, rather than the fact that it had been written by Sarah Kane'" (Hattenstone 31). Clearly, Kane experienced sex/gender bias and discrimination from critics of both sexes.

The chapters in this thesis are organized in chronological order of the plays' productions. Each of the four plays has its own particular issues carefully worked out through their central themes, theatrics, and success as theatre. For that reason, I have chosen to dedicate a chapter to each play.

Chapter One deals with Kane's first professionally produced play, *Blasted*, and focuses on the themes and problematic dynamics of private versus public violence, and the manner in which sexual violence actively and passively creates and maintains power structures. Within *Blasted* there is a crisis of masculinity that I discuss in correlation to

the ways in which male violence serves as a way of maintaining patriarchal power structures, as a weapon of war, and as erotic stimulus. At the time of the original production, much discussion surrounded *Blasted* as to whether or not it was meant to be understood as a metaphor for the Bosnian crisis in 1995; I will discuss the ways in which the text simultaneously invites and resists these choices as a reading. Of central importance to understanding *Blasted* is the way in which Kane makes use of the Fictional Stage World to pose difficulties for audience in trying to make sense of the events that occur.

Chapter Two examines *Phaedra's Love*, a play based in the tradition of Classical tragedy, yet departing from it to create and challenge its classification of postmodern tragic genre. In *Phaedra's Love*, Kane works with the tragic form in a new way. *Phaedra's Love* continues *Blasted*'s theme of power and sexual violence but also includes a critique of such patriarchal institutions as church and state. The eroticization of violence manifest as rape is the play's central concern, as is the theme of violation. Since the rape in question does not technically occur, the play is more aptly understood as a violation play rather than a rape play. *Phaedra's Love* confronts extreme violence, through the ironic use of Greek mythology, coupled with the dysfunctional behaviours of characters entrapped and encoded within a violent language and within the characters' linguistic limitations. Despite the sensation that these characters lack the ability to evaluate themselves critically and to express themselves adequately, Kane manages, by manipulating these linguistic limitations, to create an effective urban poetry in the play that mirrors the inherent violence in the society.

Chapter Three analyzes Kane's fourth play, *Crave*. As a less traditional piece of theatre, *Crave* features language as a variety of main character, and presents a crisis in language: the ability or inability to communicate psychological pain and trauma. Of all the plays, *Crave* displays most directly the effect of the correlation between the postmodern condition and the experience of trauma, both complexly intertwined with problems of memory and repetition. In this chapter I also analyze the playwright's invocation of craving, desire and memory as thematic issues and tropes for trauma. A prominent feature of *Crave* is the text's intentional indeterminacy; I will discuss the various ways in which this affects the interpretation.

Chapter Four presents a discussion of Kane's final and posthumously produced play *4:48 Psychosis*. It is a play written as a poem that portrays a psychological descent into madness and suicide.[14] It is also a study of the relationship between pain, language

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[14] The subject matter itself is not original. Ken Kesey's 1962 novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and 1975 film (based on an unauthorized script) are an example of a famous artistic examination of madness, institutions for the psychologically ill and suicide. While Kane's play probably shares much in common with Kesey's novel (which includes narration by a paranoid schizophrenic who provides a hallucinatory feel to the institutional atmosphere), suicide, and the treatment of mental patients (in Kesey's case with ECT therapy), the form of delivery once the novel became film is vastly different. The novel, in many ways, is more postmodern than the film. The novel postmodernly engages in social criticism with images of an all-powerful, all-seeing bureaucratic "harvesting machine" designed to foster complete social integration--a Combine, that would squelch all individuality and create a compliant society (both within the hospital and in the wider society). Those who were non-conforming would be relegated to a correctional facility for repair or removal. Similar fears of homogeneity are expressed in Kane's play through her depiction of the character's mistrust of medication, and the motives of the doctors in general. In contrast to Kane, and the original novel, the film *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* depicts a highly developed set of characters, with distinct identities and unique psychological make-up. Furthermore, the film uses a conventional narrative that depicts the day-to-day events and actions of the characters that renders the film more conventional in its delivery than both Kane's play and Kesey's novel.

and trauma. *4:48 Psychosis* is Kane's most experimental piece in its form as she dispensed even with designating distinct voices in her script. This contributes to making it her most deliberately indeterminate text. In this chapter I will include a discussion of the effects of the stage production of the premier production in London, June-July 2000.

Chapter Two

Blasted

> If tragedy is dead, then as we have seen already it is because it posits a sense of value which a history of terror has supposedly extinguished. (Terry Eagleton *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* 206)

> I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities. As I move from one reality to another, I experience the transition as a kind of shock. (Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckman *The Social Construction of Reality* 71)

Blasted was the first of Kane's plays to be produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, January 12, 1995. It was touted in the print media as one of the most controversial plays to appear on London stages. Creating a media furor, it became "the focus of some of the most aggressive reviews of the decade [...] the center of the biggest scandal to hit theatre since Mrs. Whitehouse tried to close Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* in 1981" (Sierz 91).[1] Accused of inflicting unnecessary and gratuitous violence upon her audience, Kane made the following comment about the play, perhaps somewhat provocatively: "I don't think it is violent. It's quite a peaceful play" (Woddis). I believe that Kane's statement indicates that her play, like her comment, is an enactment of the postmodern blasé; contradictory, bored, and oppositional, Kane's play irritates the nerve endings of what might be perceived by Kane and others in London at

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[1] Mrs. Mary Whitehouse in conjunction with the National Viewers and Listeners Association "argued that a simulation of what she saw as an act of 'gross indecency' was itself such an act--and therefore an offence under the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, a law usually used against those caught having sex in public toilets.... The prosecution withdrew its case and the press, deprived of a spectacle, attacked Whitehouse for wasting public money" (Sierz 27). That and her earlier involvement regarding censorship have resulted in her name being used to refer to any situation in which someone is claiming moral outrage at acts depicted in theatre.

this time as an atrophied and necrotic society. Nevertheless, and despite the potential for the excitement of high tragedy to be enacted, Kane's play is a bored, and at times boring, representation of violence incessantly repeated until the audience ceases to care. The paradox of Kane's statement and the situation that it describes, recalls Linda Hutcheon quoting Anne Friedberg's pronouncement of postmodern parody: "it was conservative politics, it was subversive politics, it was the return of tradition, it was the final revolt of tradition, it was the unmooring of patriarchy, it was the reassertion of patriarchy" (Hutcheon *Politics* 13).[2] In this manner, paradoxically, contradictorily, predictably and inflammatorily, Kane seeks to address her own culture "from inside it," to make it "question its values and its self-constructing representations" (13). At times, this play seeks to dismantle grand narratives, and yet at other times, it appears to invoke and perpetuate them, perhaps at times in parodic intent. The self-constructedness of the situation in *Blasted* is as Kane suggested in an interview: it is no more shocking than the condition that produced it. It can only be shocking--revolting and repulsive--if, as readers, we claim to occupy an objective vantage point or moral high ground that denies our participation, on some level, in the subjective reality Kane enacts in her play.

[2] At the time of the publication of Linda Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism Second Edition (2002)* Friedberg's 'Mutual indifference: feminism and postmodernism' was an unpublished manuscript.

With *Blasted*, Kane ushered in a new era of graphic, shocking and disturbing theatre.[3] Kane, referring to *Blasted*, commented in an interview: "Personally, I think it is a shocking play, but only in the sense that falling down the stairs is shocking--it's painful and it makes you aware of your own fragility, but one doesn't tend to be morally outraged about falling down the stairs" (Sierz 94). In her comment Kane appears to be rampaging through the delicate conundrum of "how to confess the fragility of culture without being duped by its foes," in other words, "how to acknowledge this darkness [violence] without being claimed by it" (Eagleton 287). Kane's statement denies moral opposition to her work and forces readers and audiences to consider the play's events and atrocities without moral pronouncement. The play's features are violent, and shocking; they are neither good, nor evil, they happen, and it is up to the audience to try to make sense of these events.

Blasted initiates theatre audiences to Kane's concept of the postmodern condition as an essentially violent, and consequently traumatic experience. In this chapter I address the various ways in which Kane conflates violence and erotic practice, public and private violence, and the void of human existence. Initially I invoke Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* in order to locate the specific postmodern features of *Blasted*. Due to the furor created by the premiere of *Blasted*, I address possible reasons for this play's troubled reception, aside from its challenging content. For this purpose, I draw upon

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[3] Historically, she is following a tradition of graphic, shocking and disturbing theatre. An earlier case in point is Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* plays, which date from 1896, that seem to delight in the repetition of the word "ubu" every time the name is spoken, and the multiple opportunities for scatological humour. The scatological tradition seems to date to Aristophanes *The Clouds*, and to at least the Middle Ages in Britain in some of the medieval mystery plays.

Susan's Bennett's model of the theatrical experience in *Theatre Audiences* in order to theorize the issues of audience reception as they might pertain to *Blasted*, in particular Bennett's conception of a Fictional Stage World which allows me initially to address why *Blasted* was so entirely shocking to critics and audiences. [4] As a consequence of not having seen a production of *Blasted*, I focus primarily on my textual analysis, with only prefatory reference to production issues. Because I rely solely on the script, I refer mostly to an ideal reader and only occasionally to any actual audience's experience of the work. In a close reading of several key scenes I discuss the way in which the construction of masculinity plays a role in the politics of sexual violence as well as more public forms of non-sexual violence, since Kane juxtaposes the private violence between Cate and Ian in the hotel room with the public violence of war. Accordingly, I also discuss how Kane posits sexual violence as a feature of war. My analysis of *Blasted* takes into account the manner in which she represents media and various levels of desensitization within the play. In order to read Kane's extreme portrayal of sexual violence effectively, I turn to Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. This discussion leads into an analysis of abjection in the play drawn from Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on*

[4] During my study of *Blasted* it occurred to me that the play's presentation and the audience's relationship to the stage may be a factor in audience's difficulties with the play. Bennett's audience reception theory seemed like a logical place to begin a study of relationship amongst the play's form, content and audience.

Abjection.[5] I also situate Kane's play within a recent tradition of challenging British playwriting by considering Kane's predecessor Edward Bond and his play *Saved*, first performed in 1965.[6]

The publicity that surrounded the production of the play was itself a type of performance. The production elicited reactions that were "ritualized and often frivolous. How serious can you take a review that comments, 'Ah, those familiar faeces'?" (Sierz 95). In what I believe to be an attempt to discredit the play and its challenging content, the press seemed to be absolutely desperate to unearth any gossip on the play, the production, and especially the playwright, even to the extent of behaving in an extremely unprofessional manner. Anne Mayer, the Royal Court's press officer, reports that one day she "found [a journalist] under her desk. He left quietly" (95). While the publicity helped fill the seats of the tiny Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, the effect may have been that audiences who came to see the play already held an opinion formed by the media hype. As Sierz notes, "[t]he paradox of the scandalous publicity is that while it enables more people to participate in an event than attend it, it also blinds those that see it" (105). Kane commented that "Because of the media attention[…]'no one could see the play anymore'" (105). Just as the main character, Ian, is blinded literally by a soldier, and

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[5] I have chosen to use Kristeva's theory of the abject where it seems most appropriate to use such a theory, rather than to use it as an overall theory, because the plays themselves are not exclusively studies of abjection, but rather periodically include abject behaviours.

[6] It is interesting to speculate on the possibility of renewed interest in a play such as *Saved*, which portrays the stoning and murder of an infant by a group of neighborhood men, one of whom is the baby's father, in the mid-1990's in Britain, following the sensationally covered 1993 Jamie Bulger case. The case involved two young boys from Merseyside, both aged 10, who lead 2 year old Jamie Bulger out of a shopping centre, two and a half miles away to a railway line where they killed Jamie and left his body. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/bulger/article/0,2763,195274,00.html>

metaphorically de-sensitized to the barrage of images and news stories, audiences are subject to the blinding effect of the media's barrage of reactive discourse surrounding the play. The result is that the excessive media verbiage imposes another layer of meaning, complicating, if not blocking, independent audience interpretation.

A valuable comparison can be made with Edward Bond, one of Kane's named influences, who similarly grappled with violence as a social phenomenon in his play, *Saved*. This discussion helps contextualize the dramatic heritage with which Kane directly engaged, while she also pushed beyond these literary precedents.[7] Bond's "early work," most significantly, was completely committed to "exposing a system [,] corruption and insanity of a world founded on capitalism" (Hirst 4). He was "an artist committed to changing society in advocating the abolition of social and economic privilege" (2). Bond's first fully produced and staged play, *Saved*, unsettled audiences and the media, presumably because it was an exposé of a class of English society that would be unfamiliar to the privileged audience watching it. The play asks the audience to relate their own socially privileged values to the lower-middle class observed in the drama and "ask why they are so different" (30-1). Kane uses a similar approach of audience confrontation, and I believe with similar intent: to shake up middle-class sensibilities, and draw attention to the entrenched and perpetual existence of class structure in modern England. In *Saved*, Bond presents working-class figures, "not to comment on the mores [,] but to present a life-style which is conditioned entirely by social circumstances" (50). As Kane would be 30 years later, Bond was concerned with

[7] I see Kane as a part of the socially active British theatrical history, and while I read her work as continuing an agenda initiated by writers such as Bond, Brenton, Barker, Beckett, Pinter, I am not sure that Kane would have shared Bond's socialist viewpoint.

his increasingly violent society. On this issue, Bond stated that "society unjustly deprives many of its members--specifically and literally the working people--in that they are denied economic and social conditions productive of a healthy culture. The resultant violence, bred of ignorance and frustration, is therefore the fault as much of society as of the individual" (51). In my opinion, Bond, with his socialist politics, may have been putting too much blame on society; nevertheless, in seeking to understand violence, Bond attempts to shake up educated, middle-class complacency and to re-educate his audience's ideology of class structures. Thirty years after *Saved* was first staged, Kane grappled with similar societal concerns as Bond, but the situation in Kane's writing seems even more desperate. Not only is Kane's society likely to be more violent than when Bond wrote *Saved*, but the contexts for different forms of violence have become much more complicated. Issues such as continued and increasing unemployment move the focus from the working class to the underemployed and unemployed in *Blasted*, as exemplified by Kane's construction of the character Cate. Expressions of violence are further complicated by growing racist sentiments, war, and sexism, and are exemplified by Ian and the Soldier. As an ongoing issue in Britain, the working middle class is still deprived of opportunity. Concern for the lack of opportunity amongst people like Cate can be detected in Kane's play, as well as in almost all of the plays of those who have been loosely grouped with Kane as a movement: Ravenhill, Welsh, Butterworth, Prichard, Weller, and Grieg, to name but a few of the more prominent "Cool Britannia" members.

In *Saved*, Bond stages the potential for violence within Britain's working class.

The most disturbing scene in Bond's *Saved*, and the site of the most controversy, is the scene in which a baby is stoned. This complicated scene allows several ideas within the context of the play to come together. The baby is regarded as "an object, an inconvenient object," while the mother, Pam, is the product of deprivation; she lacks education and, therefore, opportunity and economic power. The boys' actions heighten their deprived situation in which lack of privilege and opportunity is epidemic.

> Theirs is a culture based on contempt for life; hence the attitude to sex as obscene, the occasion for smutty jokes and physical assaults on one another.[...]The escalating violence is entirely comprehensible in terms of bravado and consideration of the child as a dirty sub-human creature with no feeling whose punishment 'is therefore justified'. There is no sadism [which would render the scene gratuitous] in the attitude of the boys in this scene; their cruelty is cold, unfeeling. (Hirst 53)

Bond's presentation of a culture that exhibits contempt for life is also evident in many of Kane's characters caught in exactly this nihilistic cycle: the Soldier and Ian in *Blasted*, and Hippolytus in *Phaedra's Love*, for example. The major difference between Bond's manner of presentation of atrocities and Kane's is that, at the time of Bond's production, Bond could easily establish a smooth cause-effect relationship between socialization and economics. In Kane's play, the violence is a couple of generations removed from Bond's root causes and premises and, as such, Kane's depictions are of a violence so endemic that audiences may have difficulty identifying both the meaning of all the acts of violence, and in pinpointing the causes.

Theatrically, Bond's *Saved* is a piece of stark realism. Although Kane does not practice this type of social realism, she uses moments of realism when they might be theatrically effective; she oscillates that technique with more stylized theatrical methods. Kane shares with Bond a similar subversive social intent, coupled with the desire for social change.

Blasted's plot is simultaneously deceptively simple and difficult to summarize. The play begins with Cate and Ian entering a posh hotel room, where the entire action of the play takes place. Ian attempts to seduce Cate; at the end of scene one/top of scene two, it is implied that he has raped her. As the play progresses, it is learned that Cate had only agreed to go with Ian to this room because Ian "sounded unhappy" (Kane 23). In the second half of the play, a soldier forces his way into the hotel room, and makes a hostage of Ian. The Soldier, realizing that there has been a woman in the room, attempts to search her out and discovers that Cate has escaped through the bathroom window. He describes to Ian the violence he has inflicted upon other people, predominantly women, during his tour in the war. He inflicts several horrors upon Ian, such as raping and blinding him. At the top of scene four the Soldier has "*blown his own brain out*" (50). Cate returns with a baby that someone has given her to look after. At this point, Ian is on the brink of death. The baby dies and Cate buries it under the floorboards. Cate goes out in search of food; Ian "*eats the baby*" (60). Ian places himself under the floorboards, still on the brink of death. Cate returns; it is obvious that she has exchanged sex for food or has been raped: "*[t]here is blood seeping from between her legs*" (60). She eats and drinks, and then feeds Ian. In the final moment of the play, Ian dies.

The title of this play evokes many connotations. As verb, "blasted" signifies that an explosive device has been detonated and everything has been blown apart. On a figurative level, this demolition image works well, since within this play, previous conceptions about society, war, sexuality and violence are about to be "blasted." Kane also drops a bomb on the play's represented world, blasting to pieces the lives of the main characters, Cate and Ian, and in the process blasts apart a façade that conceals the power structures within the relationships of the various characters. In England, "blasted" also is commonly used as an adjectival curse, or can stand alone as an expletive (Blasted!), damning that which inspires the curse. In any case, the title indicates destruction or desire for destruction. If the two common uses are taken together, blasted can be understood to signify the destruction of dreams, hopes, happiness and even love, damned as they all are in such a desperate existence.

Blasted's script, unlike Kane's later plays, follows a traditional playscript format. For this play, Kane provided her most extensive stage directions. There are explicit and plentiful directions on the set's appearance, and the characters' appearances, names, accents, and gestures. Because of the abundant stage and set directions, it is possible to speculate how this authorial intervention in the meaning delivery affects and persuades readers, and more specifically, how the staging will manipulate audience response to the setting in performance, Therefore, the first aspect of the play I will address is the fictional stage world and the postmodernity of the text.

Blasted exemplifies my proposition that Kane's plays present the postmodern condition as an essentially traumatic and traumatized experience. Everything about the play is traumatic, both within the play's text and as theatre experience: the graphic

portrayal of sexual violence; the provocative stance it takes with its audience; and its display of grotesque and nauseating acts. This play portrays a society that functions within a paradigm of violence and in which sexual violence is endemic. To make sense of the play's violence and the inherent trauma, one must scrutinize the play's context and certain problems relating to its postmodernity.

I have already claimed that Kane's work in general is more radical than the majority of writers that are taken to be a part of the "Cool Britannia" brigade. Part of what makes *Blasted* more theoretically engaging may be found in its radical awareness of its relationship to history.

As a postmodern text, *Blasted* exemplifies the concept of the postmodern zone as defined by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction*. McHale's theory of the postmodern is grounded in the concept's problematics. McHale, quoting Richard Kostelanetz, reiterates the crux of the problem of the term itself: "'Post [...]is a pretty prefix, both today and historically, for major movements are defined in their own terms, rather than by their relation to something else... No genuine avant-garde artist would want to be 'post' anything'" (McHale 3). The realization that postmodernist art is in fact "post," rather than "*avant*," or a nominal in its own right, may in fact indicate the sense that artists who participate in this aesthetic may be acutely aware of their duty, or rather their curse of being left with the detritus, and the leftovers of a humanity that had once had the luxury of clarity of a view of the future. However, postmodernism, as enacted by Kane and others during her time, suggests a boredom with such romantic postulations and lofty aspirations that believe that artists can continue to be able to define their worlds and existence in their own terms. McHale contends that the term postmodernism "signifies a

poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future." (5) Furthermore, McHale theorizes, following Roman Jakobson, that the crux of the difference between modernism and its progeny postmodernism lies in the critical shift in the dominant aesthetic mode: the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological in its concern, and the dominant of postmodernism is ontological in its conception and execution. Upon this basis, McHale devises his theory of space in the fictions of postmodernist writing. McHale suggests that in postmodernism, there is a "special status of the fictional text" (33); "postmodernist fiction does hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever before, is plural." (39) McHale argues that the postmodern fictional world is "a problematical world," and appropriates Foucault's concept of heterotopia to describe the process of world-making occurring in postmodern fictions that entails the

> linking together of things that are inappropriate [...] in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry [.] Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to hold together. (Cited in McHale 44)

Furthermore, McHale asserts that the space or zone that postmodernist fictions portray is less a constructed space than a deconstructed space, involving such techniques of spatial arrangement as "*juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, and misattribution*" (45).

Kane's presumed constructed space of hotel room and then as bomb-blast site, is a "deconstructed" space, which adheres to McHale's description of a "postmodern zone" (McHale 45). Kane's set becomes a space in which a number of "fragmentary possible worlds coexist in an impossible space" (45). In *Blasted*, the space between Britain and Bosnia has become contiguous, rendering setting as an example of McHale's concept of "heterotopia," a hybrid space which is disturbing because of its indeterminate, "uncanny" setting. In *Blasted*, rather than creating a locale for the play's action, Kane deconstructs conventional notions of place and setting. It is Leeds, but it is also not Leeds; it could be Bosnia, except that it is not. The set is dismantled scene by scene, indicated primarily by markers of changing space, the flowers that are strewn about the room, and next by the entrance of the Soldier, and later by the mortar blasted walls. Even the Soldier's act of "*stand[ing] on the bed and urinat[ing] over the pillows*" (39) is a complex act--however profane--of deconstruction of a supposedly discrete and intimate space: the bedroom. [8] Two private spaces, the bedroom and the bathroom, and two intimacies are vulgarized by the Soldier's act of urination, and also made obscene through the decontextualized action (urinating on the bed), and the use of the intimate space of the bed for such an act. Furthermore the act itself, a private act that is normally enclosed, is made public, as is the space of the bed and bedroom, upon the entrance of the Soldier. The demolition continues

[8] Here I am using the word deconstruction quite literally to indicate a dismantling of the physical space; but, I am also using it to provoke questions of Derridean deconstruction as well, which arguably seek to dismantle literary space.

as the hotel room is blown apart, and when Ian literally dismantles the remaining space further by removing the floorboards, both private foundation and, extra-textually, the stage as a public viewing space. Kane infuses her play with such confusion of locality and, also eventually, with confusion over the passage of time. Through these spatial deconstructions, Kane constructs her postmodern scene as a zone of contention both within the play and for the audience. In other words, previous conceptions regarding space and location are "blasted." Because of Kane's contentious use of space, the play is postmodern in its traumatized condition and also in its theory of postmodern space as indeterminate, fragmented, and violently indeterminate.

Questions have been raised about where, exactly, *Blasted* takes place, despite the script's clarity, or rather claim that it is Leeds. Due to the play's established postmodernity, it is reasonable to infer authorial doubt as to the reliability of stage directions, setting, etc.... Is there an authorizing voice to stabilize the text, or has the authorizing voice also been "blasted?" Nevertheless, questions such as the following have been raised: "Is Kane talking about Ireland? Bosnia? Leeds?" (Curtis); and "Is Sarah Kane writing about Britain or Bosnia, real people or anguished symbols of man's inhumanity to man?" (Spencer). The implication is that audiences are unsure as to how to understand the play's location. Possibly as a result of this confusion, the play was described condescendingly as a "deeply serious attempt to imagine the horrors of Bosnia breaking through the television screen into your sitting room" (Coveney). Theatre critics had difficulty fathoming Kane's absurd presentation as a serious commentary upon the reality of war. In 1995, the parallel most obviously drawn to a real life occurrence of violent atrocities is with Bosnia. As the Balkan crisis was heating up, cease fires were

declared and then broken, treaties drawn up and rejected, Sarajevo was under heavy Bosnian Serb attack and NATO replaced UN troops and commenced air strikes against Bosnian Serbs.[9]

The Balkans were in a state of confusion. This parallel is most typically drawn by critics and audiences in order to construct meaning from the play. Despite the play's nominal setting in a very British Leeds, Kane indicates that the Bosnian crisis was indeed her source of inspiration for the second half of the play:

> At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing [in March 1993] I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, 'please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing. Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted to write about was what I'd just seen on television. So, my dilemma was: do I abandon my play (even though I'd written one scene I thought was really good) in order to move onto a subject I thought was more pressing? Slowly, it occurred to me that the play I was writing was about this. It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each

[9] In order to avoid too lengthy a discussion of the Bosnian crisis, I have gathered and summarized in very simple and brief terms, some of what I believe to be the pertinent highlights of that year from information from Rutgers news wire service: http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian_digest/212/t212-6.htm

other. (Sierz 100-1) [10]

Kane's play exhibits postmodern conceptions of hybridity, in its oscillation not only of space, but also of events. Such an effect forces viewers to consider the Balkan crisis and also to consider the possibility of war in Britain. The playwright's liberty to blend the real (Bosnia) with the fictional (Cate and Ian in Leeds), might also pose certain challenges to an audience's willingness to accept or resist the play's proposed events.[11] Furthermore, while, on the one hand, praise may be showered upon Kane for her astute aesthetic presentation of world events, social and political critics, on the other hand, might level the criticism that Kane is a naïve writer whose grasp on geopolitics reveal an essentialism toward ethnic and complex global crises.

At any point in history, an infinite number of parallels could be drawn between the horror presented in *Blasted* and a real-life event in a war-torn country. Interestingly, she is dramatizing the presence of an absent center; nowhere in the script is the word Bosnia mentioned and yet it is the context most often referred to in the print media as the external referent of the play's civil unrest. The external referents of Kane's play are complicated in a postmodern fashion, which in turn is a symptom of trauma and dissociation. What should be assimilated and understood is displaced and

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[10] At the time that Kane was finishing the play, Serbian forces under Slobodan Milosevic had been involved for at least a year in total war and campaigns of terror in Bosnia. This campaign included mass killings of civilians, concentration camps, systematic rape, and the forced displacement of millions, creating the largest flow of refugees in Europe since World War II (www.540.com/bosnia/briefings/crisis.html).

[11] This liberty of blending fiction and history is not necessarily postmodern; Shakespeare had already done this in the Renaissance. However, it is arguably its prominence, or dominance, as McHale would word it, as a feature that renders it specifically postmodern in Kane.

decontextualized so that the source of the trauma's presence is incongruous, and therefore unassimilable. While the play's inspiration and immediate commentary contains an artistic, referential metaphor to central Europe, it remains also an urgent and specific comment upon, and reference to, Britain. I believe such a focus on Britain unsettled both professional and recreational viewers.

Kane's attempt to stage the horrors of war is postmodern in other ways. Critics lambasted Kane for her "deeply serious attempt" to portray the horrors of war, but failed to grasp that the aesthetics of the play suggest a simulacrum of a microcosm of war, "for which no original has ever existed" (Jameson 321), and is in fact self-conscious of its existence as play. Postmodernism has been described by Jameson, and others, as sporting a new "'depthlessness,' a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships" (317). Surely, then, *Blasted* must be grasped in terms of its attempt to forge new ways of expressing war, not as re-enactment, but as a continuous, contiguous, pervasive, invasive, global (as opposed to regional) experience that requires its own unique mode of location, representation, and discourse. Those critics who mocked Kane's lack of depth in her criticism of the Bosnian crises, failed to grasp her practice of postmodern aesthetics which is inherently lacking in "depth," in exchange for "surface, or multiple surfaces" (318) upon which her particular crisis is played.

By embracing exclusively the play's foreign context rather than also considering the immediate realm of Britain, critics and audiences conventionally avoid any self-reflection that such a parallel should inspire. In the script, the reader is clearly informed

that the setting is a posh hotel room in Leeds, so, although problematized, the setting engages England. The characters consist of Cate, "*21, a lower middle class Southerner with a South London accent and a stutter when under stress*" (Kane 3), Ian, "*45, Welsh born but lived in Leeds much of his life and picked up the accent*"(3), and an unnamed Soldier. No matter how badly audiences and critics alike want to deny this play's confrontation of British domestic politics, these British characterizations indisputably, but in postmodern fashion, not permanently, anchor the text. Certainly, the play forces one to consider current world affairs, but it should also force audiences to consider hypothetical scenarios. In order to prevent people from reading *Blasted* as solely a commentary on Bosnia, Kane embeds many British cultural references to bring her audience back to the specificity of Britain. References to popular football teams, such as "United" and "Liverpool," and "Elland Road" Football Stadium, as well as Ian's "Welsh" heritage remind the audience of the play's British character. In her national referentiality, Kane attempts to prevent her British upper-middle-class audiences' resistance to "home truths" or, more radically, to prevent theatre from becoming a national inducement to national amnesia.

Blasted's postmodernity can also be detected in its anxiety about ontology, or

the pursuit of awareness about the state of being. [12] According to McHale, this anxiety has to do with the primacy of ontology in postmodern art: "What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (McHale 10). Late twentieth-century concern with ontology is, to my mind, an existential concern that raises questions about the nature and construction of reality, and manifests itself with the realization that "being," "does not conform to any rational, logical order or process" (Angeles 88). The form of the play suggests this pressing concern through its rupture in time and action between the first and second half of the play and through the complete disintegration of individual and spatial existence by the end of the play. Kane's characters' own struggles with their realities thereby force the reader or audience member to question ontological nature as it is manifest in artful constructions of reality. Kane never attempts to provide answers or solutions to any of these questions. I argue that here she is using postmodern techniques to provoke memory and responsibility rather than provoking escape, drift, irresponsibility and non-accountability, as postmodernism is so often characterised. In an interview, Kane declares: "'I don't really have any answers to any of the questions about violence,

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[12] As mentioned above, in *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale distinguishes modernism from postmodernism, borrowing a theoretical construct from Jacobson's theory of the dominant, by positing a shift in the dominant features. In contrast to his argument regarding postmodern fiction, McHale theorizes: "the dominant of modernism is epistemological. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as… How can interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (9). While the concept of ontology is generally considered a branch of metaphysics, I am borrowing the term as McHale invokes it to name a literary occurrence of characters and events which enact their own metaphysical problem-solving of their being in the world and relation to reality.

masculinity, morality, sexuality. What conclusions people draw are not my responsibility--I'm not in control of other people's minds and I don't want to be'"(Sierz 104-05). Sierz argues that "Kane deliberately avoids explaining herself to audiences because 'it relieves them of the effort of working things out for themselves'" (104-05). In this manner, Kane's work explicitly exposes the way that worlds and experiences are implicitly constructed. Like postmodern architecture, which aims to reveal the inner mechanisms of its existence by foregrounding all its pipes, beams, supports--turning itself inside out, her work strives to expose the inner mechanisms of social, gendered, and linguistic power, knowledge and experience. In shifting the responsibility of making meaning from the events to the audience, Kane succeeds in deconstructing the aforementioned societal structures without overtly moralizing or artificially solving the problems. Kane pushes her audience continuously to revise their own preconceived notions of reality.

Since her work emphasizes the role of the audience in creating meaning from this complex script, I draw upon Susan Bennett's model of the theatrical experience from *Theatre Audiences.* Bennett's work assists in understanding the dynamics of audience reception, particularly understanding the audience as a fraught site where meaning is generated. Her model of interactive relations, of the internal and external horizon of expectations, provides an interpretative framework to analyze the audience reception

aspect of the play[13]. Bennett's model outlines the possible roles that the audience plays in meaning-creation. It also continuously reminds us that a play's audience is itself a cultural phenomenon in that it is a product of a particular cultural moment, of particular cultural desires, with its own set of cultural ideals. In this section of my analysis, I will refer to the hypothetical audience's experience of production issues as opposed to the reader's experience of the text, as I do elsewhere in my analysis of *Blasted.*

Bennett develops a theoretical and working model that seeks to delineate the audience's role as a site for the generation of meaning in a play. To Bennett, the audience always plays a "productive role" (1) central to the theatrical experience. Bennett also understands the theatrical experience as a provisional, reciprocal, co-constitutive relationship between the theatre and the audience: "cultural assumptions affect performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions" (2). Bennett breaks down the theatrical experience into two frames: "the outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. The audience's role is carried out within these two frames and, perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection" (149). Bennett's crucial observations further facilitate my discussion of stage world issues as they pertain to *Blasted.*

The first aspect of Kane's theatrical experience which must be considered in an

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[13] Bennett borrows the concept of horizons of expectations from the German philosophy and hermeneutics of a tradition of interpretation from Gadamer, Husserl, and Heidegger. Ostensibly, the audience's ready acceptance or resistance to the presented "world," or "horizon" is located in the argument that "Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something given in advance" (Palmer 136): the closer the presented world matches the presupposition, the easier it will be for the audience to grasp the meaning.

analysis of *Blasted* is what Bennett posits as the "Fictional Stage World" (Bennett 183). This concept addresses "the material conditions of production and the positioning of the world on stage *vis-à-vis* its extra-theatrical referents" (35). As a dynamic model, Bennett's categories necessarily overlap and interact. For example, the concept of "Fictional Stage World" requires consideration for both the *mise-en-scène*, as encoded by the playwright and director (the internal horizon of expectation), as well as consideration of the way in which the audience (with its own horizon of expectations) decodes the *mise-en-scène*. Even within the act of decoding, the audience's "appraisal of the fictional world is subject to substantiation, revision or negation" (148). The way this process of analysis applies to *Blasted* may be seen by considering the interaction between the internal horizon of expectations--Kane's stage directions and setting stipulations--which resist and contradict the way in which the audience will expect and perceive the play's action, and its locale. I believe that Kane's play poses difficulties to the audience's ability to decode the many variable layers of possible interpretation that such a scenario as *Blasted* presents.

In order to commence a close reading of *Blasted*'s "Fictional Stage World," and its affect on the audience's interpretation, I present the play's explicit set directions. In *Blasted*, the stage directions stipulate that the play takes place in "*A very expensive hotel room in Leeds--the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world. There is a large double bed. A mini bar and champagne on ice. A telephone. A large bouquet of flowers. Two doors--one is the entrance from the corridor, the other leads off to the bathroom*" (Kane 3). Accordingly, the instructions are clear, detailed and precise, if somewhat suspect on a meta-interpretative level. The "Fictional Stage World"--the set as

encoded in the script by the playwright--in *Blasted* calls for a high degree of visual realism. These are explicit directions to make the set look as much like an authentic hotel room as possible. There are no indications that the action that ensues should not meet with any prior audience expectations of what constitutes reality: realistic set signals realistic action. However, as the play progresses, and more of the implicit expectations of reality are broken, audience expectations of "reality" are summarily challenged. It is important to note that the play's action never devolves into a surrealistic scenario, or fantastical realm. Despite the extremity of the events, the horror that ensues remains "real"; it exists within the realm of possibility and, therefore, it must be staged in such a way that it remains grounded in reality. The action is neither a flashback, nor the product of one of the characters' imagination. Nevertheless, the entrance of the Soldier is extraordinary in its juxtaposition with the expectations created by the neutrality of the setting of the hotel room. Previous to his entrance, there is a complete lack of foreshadowing of the events that ensue. The effect of this technique of playwriting and staging is what Bennett describes as a situation that "refuses the audience a neatly-packaged fixed 'reality'" (Bennett 157). The set dressing denies the audience simplistic explanations. After the Soldier's entrance, the audience must scramble to revise their preconceptions of how to understand the play, something the reader would not have to do to such an extent.

An additional aspect of the theatrical experience that Bennett addresses, which is applicable to *Blasted*, concerns the function of the interval. According to Bennett, the interval functions as time "available for reflection and review" (150). During *Blasted*, Kane does not allow the audience any break during which they might become disengaged

from the events. *Blasted* is written to be performed without an interval, an experience that has been described by Sierz as a "gruelling one hour and fifty minutes" (99). The lack of an interval, and time for reflection, means that the audience is blasted with a series of scenarios (the realistic hotel room, then the blasted out hotel room) and the ensuing events without the provision of time to reflect and attempt to make sense of the plot. I argue that Kane is purposefully making use of this technique to ensure that her audience does not have time to reflect but, rather, is subjected to a theatrical trauma, mirroring the trauma within the play, as a result of the play's relentless duration. The audience effect would be one of continually striving to revise their horizon of expectations and, therefore, their understanding of the play, which becomes, at best, a work-in-progress. Furthermore, according to Bennett's argument, the absence of an interval would ensure that the audience's primary understanding of the play is "in terms of the private experience" (150) of the individual audience members instead of based on discussion with, and the opinions of, others. I propose that it is also a way in which the playwright can wear out her audience. The pace and duration of the play does not give them time to recover from the events they are witnessing, arguably making them reel in confusion, simulating in a small theatrical way the exhaustion the characters presumably experience within their circumstances.

Another relevant component of Bennett's model is that of time and action in *Blasted*. One of the reasons that the form of Kane's play posed problems for theatre-goers and critics alike is the play's violation of two of the classical unities: time and action. According to Bennett, theatre that adheres to the Aristotelian unities of time, space, and action reassure the audience that the world is "a fixed and knowable world" (182). In

breaking with theatrical convention, Kane is sending her audience a message: the world that she is dramatizing, and by extension the "real" world, is anything but fixed or knowable as defined by Aristotelian theory. Adding to the confusion initiated by a break with this established form, the dislocation of these presumably unalterable unities within the play is ambiguous and inconsistent, resulting in an oscillation effect. The aesthetic result of the purposeful violation of these unities serves to bridge the "distance imposed by geography and indifference" (Sierz 107) between Britain and Bosnia. The type of parallels that Kane demands audiences to draw between current affairs and the action in the play reveal anxieties--real, imagined, and remembered--regarding the possibility of war, terrorism, personal crime, and general social insecurity.[14] In 1995, this effect served as a reminder that Bosnia is not that far away, geographically or ideologically, and that Britain must not be indifferent to the crisis in the Balkans, since it has its own internal difficulties with racially motivated violence. In blending the Bosnian affairs with those of the British, Kane forces the audience to consider the inner mechanisms of war. According to the theory postulated by Kane's play, war is not something that merely exists in news stories. Accordingly, the domestic dispute between the sexes potentially becomes street violence, and civil unrest. The rupture of the unities within the play can be further understood in terms of McHale's postmodern concept of possible worlds discussed

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[14] It may be interesting to speculate that in light of the recent events of September11, 2001, audiences viewing a production of this play now, may impose a different connection to violent events and acts of war. Bosnia may not be the location of the reader's or audience's connects with the violent events in the play. Kane had already observed this phenomenon during a Belgian production. The play was performed just after "the child-abuse ring in Brussels had been exposed 'and the whole play became about the baby and there were people crying in the audience when the baby was buried. It bore very little relation to my play, but I accepted it as a genuine reinterpretation" (Kane in Sierz 105).

earlier. Such a rupture is ontological in its nature, and lends further support to my argument that Kane's play poses ontological problems to its readers and audience.

In violating conventional unities, Kane forces audiences to consider the minutia of the realities of violence and, specifically, war. Rather than understanding war as distant, generalized and stereotypical, and rather than becoming entrenched in the technicalities of imitating war in the theatre, Kane opted for a more radical approach. In an interview, Kane divulged her thoughts on this topic: "'What this needs is what happens in war--suddenly violently, without any warning, people's lives are completely ripped to pieces'" (Sierz 102). When Kane says *Blasted* is disturbing because the form of the play is the content, she is referring to the sudden and unpredictable disruption of stage and performance, a war-like disruption that entails the destruction of not only the set, but also, more shockingly, audience expectation. *Blasted* is disturbing not simply because the events that occur within it are graphic, but because the manner in which the events are presented is disturbing. To this end, Kane practises her own version of Brecht's alienation techniques, techniques that are aimed at forcing the audience to rid themselves of their complacency, and reconsider the magnitude of the events that are taking place right on the very doorstep of Western Europe. In challenging audience expectations, Kane is asking the audience to consider alternative possibilities. Kane explains: "'War is confused and illogical, therefore it is wrong to use a form that is predictable'" (102). If the play had been set on a battlefield, the expectation would include the violence that ensues. By displacing the violence to the obviously domestic and privileged setting of a posh hotel, in an innocuous city, the established rules of setting abruptly change. The audience must revise its expectations to accommodate this new, possible world. Audience

and critical resistance are due to the fact that the brutality of this world is not easily assimilated into pre-existing conceptions of reality. Dramatically, Kane's staging imitates the process of trauma. Finally, Kane's disruption of unity inspires audience reaction and confusion that is typically postmodern by creating a type of Jamesonian "postmodern hyperspace," a space, and location in which the body is unable to "locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world" (Jameson 15-6).

Another feature of Bennett's model that assists in elucidating meaning in Kane's play is consideration for the principle of time. Kane uses conventional time during the play as a technique to draw in her readers and audience, only to rupture the established passage of time in order to further alienate them from arriving at a cohesive understanding of the play's development. One of the ways in which Kane effects this is through the increase in the tempo of the passage of time over the course of the play, until the play begins to feel as if it has come to exist within Jameson's notion of time as a "series of perpetual presents" (20). As the play begins, it appears to be taking place in "real" time. Between scene one and scene two, time begins to speed up. Evidence of Kane's desire for the director to achieve this effect is located in Kane's stage directions that indicate that it is not simply hours or days that are passing but entire seasons.[15] The passage of time between seasons is completely, and deliberately nonsensically out of sync with the way in which time is actually passing within and between the scenes. At the

[15] As mentioned in my "Introduction", I have raised the issue of textual clarity versus the claim, in which the authority of the text is in question due to the play's presumed postmodernity. Arguably, there is no authorizing voice to stabilize the text. These nearly impossible stage directions might be false.

end of scene one is the nearly impossibly executable instruction that *"The sound of spring rain"* can be heard (Kane 24). From the beginning of scene two to the beginning of scene three, despite the fact that the events could occur within the span of a few hours, there is an indication, again within the stage directions, that an entire season has passed: "*The sound of summer rain*" (39). Another season passes between scene three and four, even though there is no indication in the dialogue between the Soldier and Ian that any more than a few hours may have passed although it is now autumn. The end of scene four brings time in the play to winter, making the events of the play take place over the course of one year. The passage of time speeds up, inexplicably, from this point onward. This effect is carried out by blackouts, alternating with short spotlighting, which are indicated by stage directions that intend the production to reveal a series of vignettes or tableaux, almost in photographic style that depict Ian in varying degrees of degradation: masturbating; strangling himself; defecating; hysterically laughing; dreaming; crying; and finally, a moment of stillness. The final tableau reveals Ian in an act of cannibalism; the stage directions stipulate that Ian "*eats the baby*" (60). The effect is that of time passing rapidly, and yet there is no change in the situation. When Cate returns to the hotel room, time slows to a more reasonable realistic pace again. Kane uses the rupture of time as a distancing technique in order to alienate her audience and therefore, shock them into considering afresh the issue of violence. By rupturing the passage of time, the events betray a sense of urgency due to the anxiety an audience might feel as a result of the disorienting effect of time that has gone out of sync.

Bennett's fictional stage world model provides insight into understanding why *Blasted* proved difficult for some critics to accept as art. Bennett's model of the theatrical

experience provides the framework that enables an analysis of the particular ways in which *Blasted* could have shocked theatre-goers. Her model enables the reader to pinpoint the way in which the form of Kane's play itself (as opposed to merely its disturbing content) resists audience identification. The play's forceful rupture of unity in place and time are disturbing, cause discomfort, and deter and delay interpretation. In order to further this discussion I will now begin an examination of the themes and issues raised by the play.

As noted earlier, the play's story, and by proxy the characters, display ontological/existential concerns such as the lack of a belief that the universe is "created, supported by an omnipotent, benevolent God" (Angeles 88). This is demonstrated by Ian's professed lack of faith in religious ideology. In the following conversation, Cate is responding to Ian's off-the-cuff remark that he is ready to shoot himself because he is so hungry. Cate asserts that it is wrong to kill oneself, and Ian asks her why:

Cate. God wouldn't like it.

Ian. There isn't one.

Cate. How do you know?

Ian. No God. No Father Christmas. No fairies. No Narnia. No fucking nothing.

Cate. Got to be something.

Ian. Why?

Cate. Doesn't make sense otherwise.

Ian. Don't be fucking stupid, doesn't make sense anyway. No reason for there to be a God just because it would be better if there was. (55)

Ian expresses belief only in that which has "a scientific explanation" (56). According to this belief system, in the face of horror such as that with which these characters contend, it would be better to believe that there were no God who is responsible. In the predicament that Kane's characters find themselves, there seems to be no use for a traditional Christian conception of God. The idea of God is simply another example of an illogical concept, a construct like any in the crisis of postmodernism. In the context of the play's covert reference to Bosnia, religious affiliation is the vehicle by which war and exploitation have been justified. I propose that Ian's atheism is further evidence of the existential nature of the play, expressing the existential realisation that "[r]eality cannot be reduced to a neat system since it is inherently unintelligible, noncategorizable, amorphous" (Angeles 89). Hence, the structure of the play is such that it conforms to some expectations of reality, while it unpredictably ruptures others. By the end of the play, the characters and their predicaments disintegrate into a nearly incomprehensible state of abjection, from which reassembly seems impossible. The themes of aetheism and nihilism within the play mark it as excessively existential and, furthermore, they become another point of contention upon which conventional theatre critics and theatre-goers can unleash their disapproval.

One of the most important themes in *Blasted* can be found in the sinister exploration of the relationship between gender roles, sex and violence, and war that often manifests itself in scenes as grotesque displays of human behaviour. In the scenario of

war, Kane depicts sex as a form of violence: war uses sex as a weapon, and war is institutionalised violence. Kane constructs the triad of this relationship between Ian and Cate, Ian and the Soldier and Cate's own eventual entrance into the theatre of war. Sexual acts are generally erotic in nature, but in *Blasted,* sex is used as a weapon of violence. The tension between the sexual and the violent has necessitated particular sensitivity and awareness on the part of the playwright that sexual violence contains the potential for erocticization. In her mode of staging of sexual violence, Kane presents the way in which sex has been co-opted by armies as a weapon of war. I argue that this may be the reason why so many people made the connection between *Blasted* and Bosnia, since it is was also in 1995 that rape atrocities carried out during the war campaign in Bosnia were revealed to the rest of the world. Traditionally, the use of sex in war is a means of inspiring nationalism in a soldier whose morale may be lowered due to combat experience. Suggesting, as the play does, that Britain could possibly find itself in a disturbing situation similar to that in the Balkans explains why it is no wonder that the play's locale proved so difficult to accept. The implications of the play point the finger at its patrons. *Blasted* is the enactment of what happens when intimate and private violence becomes public. In reality, sexual oppression was being meted out between warring ethnicities in the Balkans, while in Britain the war can be found primarily operating between the rigid class and race structure on the one hand, and the economic divide on

the other. [16] That is what enables Ian's (gainfully employed, if sleazy, tabloid reporter) exploitation of Cate (lower class, uneducated).

I argue that Kane is sensitive to the fact that rape is an invisible crime and as a result she has carefully staged many of the complex issues surrounding rape in a dramatic manner. In particular, it seems that, in *Blasted*, Kane is making the connection between the way in which rape is used during war or ethnic terrorism and rape as a debilitating and destabilizing tactic of domestic, sexual violence. The play traces the progression of sexual violence from a private, destabilizing technique in intimate settings to its eventual appearance as a calculated tactic of war.

Sexual violence strategically operates in *Blasted*. Throughout the first scene, Ian is obsessed with seducing Cate. Each unsuccessful attempt inspires more violent determination on his part. Ian is unable to accept that Cate is unwilling to have sex with him. From his perspective of presumed male superiority he cannot grasp why she would come to the hotel with him if not for sex. The following episode is an example of Ian's perplexion in the face of Cate's refusal.

Ian. …That's why I love you, want to make love to you.

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[16] It came to my attention in researching this play that the original production coincides with a new widespread awareness of the current practice of rape as a tactic of war, as evidenced by the formation of the creation of the United Nations International Tribunal to "prosecute war crimes in the former Yugoslavia…" including the "widespread or systematic rape as an indictable offence" (Copelon 191). According to Copelon, traditionally, "the rape of women in war has drawn occasional and short- lived international attention. It comes to light as part of the competing diplomacies of war, illustrating the viciousness of the conqueror or the innocence of the conquered. When war is done, rape is comfortably filed away as a mere and inevitable 'by-product,' a matter of poor discipline, the inevitable bad behaviour of soldiers revved up, needy, and briefly 'out of control'" (190). The presentation of the issue of sex crimes as a feature of war, rather than an unfortunate "by-product" forces further acknowledgement of the widespread severity of the atrocity.

Cate. But you can't.

Ian. Why not?

Cate. I don't want to.

Ian. Why did you come here?

Cate. You sounded unhappy.

Ian. Make me happy.

Cate. I can't.

Ian. Please.

Cate. No.

Ian. Why not?

Cate. Can't.

Ian. Can.

Cate. How?

Ian. You know. .

Cate. Don't.

Ian. Please.

Cate. No.

Ian. I love you.

Cate. I don't love you.

Ian. (*Turns away. He sees the bouquet of flowers and picks it up*).

These are for you.

Blackout.

The sound of spring rain. (23-4)

When the lights come back up, the scenery and the ensuing dialogue imply that Ian has ignored Cate's protestations and has raped her. Flowers are strewn about the hotel room as a visual marker of the violence that has occurred. As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that Cate is in an emotional state, upset and angry about the rape. As a gesture which only serves to enforce her subordinate position, Ian dares her to shoot him, by tossing the gun on the bed and saying, "[h]ave a pop" (25). The inherent phallic association of the gun is a means by which Ian insults Cate further. He reinforces his superiority as phallic operator. [17] The role of the gun will be discussed further at a later point in this chapter.

Apparently, during rehearsals Kane personally struggled with the ethics of this scenario. In an interview, when asked whether the character of Cate was to be understood as simple-minded, Kane replied: "'no, absolutely not… That's a complete misrepresentation. She's naïve. And yes, very fucking stupid: I mean what's she doing in a hotel room in the first place? Of course, she's going to get raped'" (Sierz 103). Accordingly, I believe that Cate is to be understood as young, and as Kane says, very "naïve." She seems even more of an innocent when viewed next to Ian who is an older, jaded, and perverse, tabloid journalist and purveyor of smut in the guise of news. He is the lowest of the journalistic profession. Kane unapologetically portrays the harsh social reality in which these characters exist; a woman cannot give non-sexual comfort to an unhappy man without the risk of rape. According to this paradigm of sexual dominance

[17] To clarify, here, and elsewhere in this chapter, I am not using "phallic" in reference to Lacan's theory of the Phallic. Instead, I am attempting to restore some of the word's pre-Lacanian innocence in which phallic symbolizes penis and all of the power associated with male, patriarchal power.

and aggression, Cate is responsible for her rape because she chose to go to the hotel room. Kane reports that she lamented Cate's fate: "'Isn't it utterly tragic that this happens to her?' Kane had 'nights during rehearsals when I would go home and cry and say to myself: How could you have created that beautiful woman in order for her to be so abused? And then I would really feel a bit sick and depraved'" (103). Regardless of her emotional misgivings, Kane remained true to her agenda of depicting sexual aggression and, I believe, resisted the sympathetic urge to soften Cate's experience. The manner in which Ian treats Cate is all the more appalling for Cate's innocence.

By problematizing *Blasted*'s gender relations and the occurrence of rape in society (in war or peacetime), Kane is also problematizing, and presenting the reality of twentieth-century gender inequalities in contemporary Britain and, arguably, elsewhere in the western world. I think that the brutally shocking way in which Kane presents violent sexuality in *Blasted* makes it obvious that Kane did not believe that the audience would comprehend the seriousness of the situation if it were presented with less impact. Kane seems to believe that her audience has been numbed by the barrage of images of sex and violence that have become commonplace in television and film. In *Blasted*, Kane presents sexual violence as commonplace and expected. There is an air of dispassion and emotional distance in the force and brutality of the play's writing that renders the scenario all the more disturbing.

In order to draw attention to sexual violence, Kane has created complicated characters that exist within a complicated set of circumstances. Compounding the already complicated issue of sexual violence, Kane presents her characters as behaving contrary to expected norms. On the one hand, they represent stereotypical figures from

conventional British society; on the other hand, they are embodiments of contradictory and confusing behaviours. For example, Kane presents Ian as reacting to Cate in a number of contradictory ways. He is repulsed by her appearance because he pejoratively decides that she dresses like a "lesbos" (19); Ian perceives homosexuality, and in this scenario, lesbianism as an aberration.[18] His attitude betrays a male gender bias that defines women rigidly by their ability to fit within a particular codified system of heterosexual feminine attire and behaviour. To his sexist manner of thinking, a lesbian is any woman who does not automatically respond to men in the expected, traditional heterosexual manner and, in particular to his sexual advances. He uses the word "lesbian" as a negative label, because for him the word symbolizes aberrant female sexuality, to which he does not know how to respond. A man such as Ian, trapped as he is within rigid gender codifications, cannot fathom that women might not fit neatly into prescribed gender expectations. His ex-wife left him after her discovery that she was lesbian, which inspires, the reader discovers later in the play, much of Ian's loathing of all things lesbian. For someone like Ian, the concept of lesbianism insults his masculinity, disempowers the primacy of his sexuality and calls it into question by threatening to displace it as the absolute centre of sexual dominance.

Ian's behaviour is condescending. He assumes a position as Cate's superior. He reserves the right as male to judge what is normal and what is not by using his own

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[18] Despite Kane's own protestations to the effect that she does not want gender and sexual orientation to be an issue in regard to her as a writer, such issues arise as predominant themes distinct from the personality of the author through each and every one of her plays.

behaviours and beliefs as the yardstick for correctness. Another way in which Ian asserts himself as superior, and yet behaves in a contrary manner, is the way in which he belittles Cate, referring to her as a "Joey," which is British slang for someone who is mentally challenged. He tells her she is "stupid," and that she is "never going to get a job" (Kane 8). Furthermore, according to Ian, she is also "too thick to understand" (8) what he is talking about most of the time, and so he cannot be bothered to engage in mature conversation with her. And yet, despite, and arguably because of, his apparent dislike of her, he finds her, and more specifically, his dominance over her, sexually arousing. His arousal in the context of the unequal power dynamics between the older, more powerful male and the younger, disadvantaged woman is presented as literally a sick desire. Kane makes a moral issue of this not by directly moralizing to her audience, but through embodying terminal illness in Ian. He is a sick man, whose illness manifests itself in a sick desire. At the top of the play, before anyone has even spoken, the audience "*hear[s] him coughing terribly in the bathroom*" (4). He has already lost a lung: "Last year. When I came round, surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork, stank. My lung" (11). Within the metaphor of illness, Ian's sexual impulse towards Cate is diseased, or more literally corrupted, because it is driven by a desire to exert control over her, because she is clearly in a position of diminished power. Her opposition to Ian's advances seems only to serve to reinforce his desire for her and his agenda to sexually conquer her. Just as he stubbornly will not give up smoking and drinking, as he claims it is "[t]oo late for that" (10), he stubbornly will not give up his pursuit of Cate. The result is that Ian eventually rapes her, and Cate, constructed by Kane as a victim, is too powerless and resourceless to oppose his advances, to fight back and to leave the situation. In fact, as the play

progresses she becomes stupefied; catatonia is her response to the threatening situation in which she finds herself. Indeed, is Cate's name intended as a pun for catatonia?

Regardless of how Kane intended Cate to be understood, the reader's first impression of Cate is that she is infantile, and that she engages in behaviours that indicate a low intelligence. For example, early in the play, the stage directions stipulate that Cate is "*sucking her thumb*" (4). She stutters when nervous, is unemployed, lives with her mom, and has had "fits," ever "since [her] dad came back" (10), a symptom that suggests a history of abuse between father and daughter. She is presented in the script as somewhat asexual, or at least non-heterosexual; she is "*big smile[s], friendly, non-sexual*" (5) and naïve. We are to understand that she came with Ian, of her own naïve free will to spend the night with him, not as his lover, but as a friend, because he "sounded unhappy" (4). There is no indication in the script that Cate realizes the compromising position in which she has put herself. Ian's attitude toward Cate is that in the past she has been his lover, and because she was once his lover he has the continued right to possess her, despite that fact that she tells Ian that she is "not [his] girlfriend anymore" (15), and that she has a new boyfriend now.[19] Upon discovering that Cate has not had sexual relations with her new boyfriend, Ian responds in this manner: "Slept with me before. You're more mine than his" (16). That he can lay claim to her because of a history of sexual encounters, in Ian's mind, seems to entitle him to continued sexual access of Cate.

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[19] However, during a telephone conversation (May 19, 2003), Annie Sprinkle (former sex-trade worker, performance artist and human sexuality specialist, University of California, San Francisco) suggested that Cate's presence in the hotel room could be understood as a complicated enactment of sexual fantasy. According to Sprinkle, rape was continuously the number one sexual fantasy for at least three decades. Cate might be enacting this elicit desire; however, there is much more evidence suggesting that Ian's behavior toward Cate is predatory and violent, that indeed he rapes her.

In Ian's perception of himself as the centre of sexual dominance, he is entitled to forcibly have sex with Cate. According to the sexually violent paradigm of Ian's world, it is, in fact, his male privileged right to have sex with Cate.

Ian's behaviour in this situation suggests a particular view of masculinity on the part of the playwright. According to Alex Sierz, Kane's "vision of masculinity is not ideological but concrete [...] aggressive, manipulative and predatory, Ian's actions illustrate the mindset of the middle age male" (Sierz 104). Disturbingly, as Kane portrays it, rape seems to be a legitimate form of sexual encounter within the society of which Ian is representative. It is a system that values women very little and what value they do have is equated with property and right of sexual access. Cate is presented as being simple and unworldly, and Ian takes several opportunities to belittle her intelligence and take advantage of her naïvete. Within the play, his bullying serves to ensure that he has her firmly placed in a position of diminished power in order to facilitate sexual exploitation. Kane casts his actions, the underlying attitudes, and his masculine sexuality as essentially predatory, thus foregrounding the uneven playing field of sexual affairs in *Blasted*'s society, and perhaps, as I have suggested earlier, the play's commentary on society and the traumatic postmodern condition in which sexual predation has become the norm.

At the top of scene two, presumably after the rape has occurred, Cate is presented as an angrier woman, no longer sympathetic towards Ian's illness. The first evidence of this is when she calls him "Cunt," and "*makes a noise of disgust*" (25) in response to his presence. As further evidence of the misogynist attitude Kane reveals, the worst word Cate can think of to call him is a word that refers to her own sex. Very quickly in the scene her anger escalates to an attempt at violence as "*she goes for him, slapping him*

about the head hard and fast...still kicking, punching and biting, she takes the gun from his holster and points it at him" (26). It is several pages later that Cate finally says: "I didn't want to do it" (33), referring to the forcible sexual intercourse that took place between the scenes. I believe that it is significant that Kane chose to present this rape as invisible. Arguably, in hiding the rape from the audience's view she is staging it in a realistic manner, as a private occurrence, outside of the gaze of public scrutiny, so that the audience might be compelled to question whether are not they are entirely certain that rape has occurred.

The dramatic effect of making the rape invisible is an important detail in the play. First of all, staging it as invisible is paramount for the integrity of the seriousness with which I think that Kane wishes her audience to consider the issue: the rape is concealed so that there is absolutely no chance that it could, in any way, be eroticized during the production. Scenes of rape in artistic representation are frequently in danger of being eroticized. For the impact of the violence to be effective it must not be sensationalized; it must be presented as violence, not as sexual intercourse. Sierz cites anecdotal proof of the playwright's desire of ensuring the rape's seriousness. Apparently, Kane was extremely disturbed by a German production of *Blasted*, in which after the scene in which Cate is raped, "'the lights came up and she's lying there completely naked with her legs apart, covered in blood, mouthing off at Ian. And I just wanted to die in despair.' Kane said to the director, 'Do you think it's either believable, interesting, feasible, or theatrically valid, that she's lying there completely naked in front of the man who's raped her? Do you not think that she might cover herself up?'"(Sierz 105). In order to have the most realistic and horrific impact on the audience, the rape must take place in such a way that

circumvents previous beliefs, biases, and preconceptions the audience might hold. Cate must not be regarded as an object of desire, or an object that can be forced to reciprocate that desire. The violence of the rape must not be understood as being primarily a sexual act. There should be no confusion as to the gravity of the situation: this is an act of violence.

Staging the rape in such a way serves two other dramatic purposes. First of all, it circumvents clumsy acting and staging attempts to simulate rape, which run the risk of becoming farcical, and could diminish the perceived seriousness of this act of violence; its invisibility ensures that the staging of the rape does not fall short of the horrific reality. Secondly, it serves to confront certain biases that audience members may hold regarding rape victims and the veracity of the occurrence of rape. Its very possibility is called into question by the absence of its representation. Presenting it in this way, Kane asks the audience to scrutinize rape as it occupies space within both public and private spheres of violence. Furthermore, rape is juxtaposed with war in an oscillation of public and private forms of violence. In *Blasted*, two examples of social violence are presented as if they occupy spots along the same continuum. War, a primarily male activity, is a publicly sanctified act of violence and, therefore, more easily regulated. Rape, also a primarily male activity, is a form of violence that predominantly takes place in private, and is much more difficult to regulate and observe. In dramatizing this incident, Kane draws attention to certain biases that are prevalent in her culture, and that her readers or audience are likely to possess. For example, within the context of a private crime such as rape, there is a tendency to scrutinize the victim rather than focus on the perpetrator. The way in which media influence can confound the issue of victim compliance can be found in the

following quote: "'Society is organized to permit violence in the home; it is organized through images in the mass media and through broadly based social attitudes that condone violence'" (Schneider, qtd. in Fineman and Myktiuk 43). The result is that the private nature of such crime "'operates as a mask for inequality, protecting male violence against women'" (43). I believe that Kane is essentially trapping her reader or audience with the biases to which Schneider refers. For the purposes of understanding the play, it is too easy, and too stereotypical, to blame Cate's character for what befalls her, as Ian attempts to do when he says to her: "You sleep with someone holding hands and kissing you wank me off then say we can't fuck get into bed but don't want me to touch you what's wrong with you Joey" (Kane 32). Cate did not want to have sex with Ian. She says so. His reply reveals aggressive attitudes toward sex: "Loved me last night…Thought you liked that…Made enough noise…" (31). He completely disregards that Cate "didn't want to do it" and that she had been making noise because "[i]t was hurting" (31). Cate's helplessness in this situation makes her all the more pathetic.

I propose from my analysis of this *obscene* rape scene, that Kane is trying to effect a social awareness. In spite of all the amoral events that take place, and despite her protestation that "'the play is not actually meant to be moral'" (Sierz 114), it is in fact a very moral play. Her plays in general largely take a moral stance, but she offers her moral criticism in a way that is covert and shocking. She aims to draw attention to the problem by staging it, rather than offering any chastisement or solutions. I think that there is convincing evidence from interviews with Kane that support the view that through her art she is aiming to effect a change in society, at least by offering a critique of the things that she believes are responsible for an intolerable state of existence. An example of this

social view is a comment Kane made upon a performance of Jeremy Weller's *Mad*: "'If theatre can change lives, then it can change society'" (Sierz 92). She held the view that not only could theatre effect change, but that it is "'a reflection of the way people within that society view the world'" (93). *Blasted* contains societal atrocities; it is a play about a traumatic and traumatized society. I propose that Kane wrote *Blasted* in order to shift her audience's attitude toward domestic abuse of all varieties. If there is a lesson to be learned from this play, despite the complete lack of overt moralizing, it is that there is a need to identify and recognize the mechanisms that perpetuate sexual violence and the biases that support it. Mechanisms in need of scrutiny are found to be in operation in Ian, as I will discuss shortly.

Cate's diminished position in the hierarchy of sexual power found within the social constructs of the play, and her entry into society as a purely sexual object of male desire and power, despite her own undefined sexual orientation, is finalized when she ventures into the streets to exchange sex for food. It is at this moment that Cate becomes not only a victim of sexual violence, but also a war-crime victim. Forced prostitution, in which a woman must exchange sex for food or other such commodities necessary for survival, is often not considered one of the main features of war, but is viewed more as an unfortunate by-product.[20] It is, according to the research, however, undoubtedly common.

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[20] Although not overtly represented by Kane's text, it is interesting to note that it was not until 1993 that "systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy" are condemned and "made special mention of" in the "Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action" (Copelon 191). Perhaps the desire to associate the atrocities witnessed in this play with the crisis in Bosnia- Herzegovina, has more to do with the way in which coincidental news of the systematic rape of mainly Bosnian- Muslim women by Serbs began to make headlines in the rest of Europe. Although much attention was given to the atrocities committed by the Serbian army at this time, it was most certainly occurring on both sides of the warring factions; it has always been a tactic of war.

Despite Cate's portrayed naïveté and consequent victimization, she is the one who is astute enough to first notice and announce that it "looks like there is a war on" (33). Her line passes almost without remark or concern from Ian. His only response is to make a racist observation: "Turning into Wogland," and then flatly ask her: "You coming to Leeds again?" (34). Cate's announcement of war is a turning point from violence as private and domestic to public and societal. Her comment regarding the fact that there is a war going on marks the end of the first half of the play. In terms of Bennett's "Fictional Stage World," it also marks the end of the play's reality as readers or audience may expect it to be.

It is ironic that it is Cate who observes that there is a war, since it is Ian who, as a journalist, is supposedly "in the know" with what is going on. There are suggestions throughout the first half of the play that he is an agent of some sort: "Done the jobs they asked. Because I love this land [...] Stood at stations, listened to conversations and given the nod [...] Driving jobs. Picking people up, disposing of bodies, the lot [...]"(30). Ian should, as an agent and journalist, have some foreknowledge that a war might be imminent. I think that Kane gives Cate the job of announcing the war because of the two characters she is the one who is sensitive enough to notice. Ian has always been fighting a war; his world is by its very nature violent, and for the most part it has been he who has enacted the violence.

The episode in which Ian reveals his secretive status is made eerily disturbing because all the while that Ian is talking, explaining to Cate why he previously had to break things off, Cate is performing oral sex. Kane orchestrates a dramatic collision between sex and violence when, at the point of orgasm, Ian says the word "killer," and

Cate is directed to "*[*bite*] his penis as hard as she can*" (31). The fusion of sex and violence in this scene provides Kane with the thematic structure needed to move the play from the domestic scene of private violence in the hotel to make way for the Soldier's entrance and to turn the set into a theatre of war.

The Soldier enters the scene soon after Cate notices the war, and while Cate has gone into the bathroom supposedly to bathe; she has actually escaped through the bathroom window. By the end of the play, Cate, in her own way, becomes a type of soldier, trading sex for food. She becomes as hardened to the situation of war, as has the Soldier, as evidenced by her mundane attitude regarding prostituting herself for food:

> Ian. Where are you going?
>
> Cate. I'm hungry.
>
> Ian. Cate, it's dangerous. There's no food.
>
> Cate. Can get some off a soldier.
>
> Ian. How?
>
> Cate. (*Doesn't answer*)
>
> Ian. Don't do that.
>
> Cate. Why not?
>
> Ian. It's not you. (58-9)

Cate's exit from Scene Two facilitates the break from the intimate reality of the hotel room. It also marks the moment when the gender dynamic shifts to a hyper-masculine reality of war. The co-morbidity of war and sexual violence is further showcased between the two men, including the Soldier's own accounts of sexual crimes he has committed and the sexual violence that will take place between Ian and the Soldier.

When the Soldier forcefully enters the hotel room, the violent tension is substantially increased. In disarming Ian, and training his rifle on him continuously, the Soldier assumes the position of dominant male, a position previously held by Ian. When the Soldier disarms Ian, he is, in effect, emasculating him. Ian loses more status and masculine power when the Soldier rapes him. I say more on that point later.

The Soldier is a brash, coarse-speaking, rough character who symbolizes not only the hyper-masculinity of the military and a military society, but also is another example of the fusion between violence and sexual violence first demonstrated by Ian. He finds a pair of Cate's "knickers," and, *"he closes his eyes and rubs them gently over his face, smelling with pleasure*" (37). He then proceeds to force his way into the bathroom, presumably with the intent of raping Cate, whom we shortly discover is "[g]one" (38). The scene is short, with its oscillation between tender and violent, sets the mood for the play to fully develop into the realm of a war-time situation, when, as the next scene opens, the reader discovers that "*The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb*" (39). Part of the Soldier's dramatic function in this portion of the play is not simply to heighten the violence and impart destruction, but to serve as a storyteller.

The Soldier's stories are almost exclusively, and brutally, centred upon rape. His storytelling and his function as a storyteller render rape as a prominent feature of war. The Soldier gives several accounts of his participation in wartime rape. His narratives are boastful, brutal, and detached in their matter-of-fact manner of presentation. For example, he says:

> Went to a house just outside town [...] Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the

men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and--Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. (43)

In one of his accounts, it is the Soldier's girlfriend, Col, who was the victim of enemy soldiers' brutality. The Soldier tells Ian that his girlfriend was "buggered [...] Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door" (47). The play's accounts of rape and murder seem to be ritualized and loaded with symbolic, almost mythical gesture. The Soldier's stories tend to fragment the female form, demonstrating how within the context of war, it has been reduced to fetishized parts. It is another example of Kane's concern, found throughout her oeuvre, regarding the erotization of violence.

The Soldier's account of his girlfriend's murder also serves as a way in which he bears witness for her. However, his actions are complicated by another process of war and its subsequent trauma that I believe is in operation. I propose that the Soldier's acts of revenge, inspired by the rape and murder of his girlfriend, can be read as an act of bearing false witness. False witness can be understood as "'deriving one's solution to one's death anxiety from extreme trauma, in this case in an extreme situation by exploiting a group of people and rendering them victims'" (Lifton, qtd. in Caruth *Explorations* 139).[21] Kane may not have been able to articulate this well documented

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[21] The phenomenon was first noted by American psychologists in response to the behaviours of American soldiers during the battle of My Lai, during the Vietnam conflict, a "'situation that was inherently confusing[...]Why was one there, why were buddies and comrades dying? No one really knew. But the only thing one could do was try to make sense of the dying that had taken place, to witness the death of their comrades by carrying on their work of the killing of the enemy; by carrying it on immediately, even though no enemy was readily available[...]we assert our own vitality and symbolic immortality by denying them their right to live[...]'" (Caruth 139).

psychological behaviour, or have even been aware that it has been formally defined, but by her representation it appears that she was instinctively aware of the occurrence of this type of "witnessing" as a way of exacting revenge, specifically in situations of extreme trauma. By taking revenge for the rape and murder of his girlfriend on as many of the enemy's women as possible, Kane's Soldier is enacting a perverse justice in which "one must impose death on others in order to reassert one's own life as an individual" (140). An example of the Soldier enacting this very phenomenon can be found in the following narrative. On the brink of remembering Col, he is brought to a livid and violent return to the situation at hand. " Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of--Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles" (Kane 43). In this situation his own repulsive behaviour and the violence that he inflicts upon the brothers and father is sexually arousing for him, while the memory of his violently murdered girlfriend increases the violent/erotic tension of the situation. He metes out a twisted justice. The intrusion of the memory of his girlfriend during this moment is ruptured by the brutality of his actions and the reminder that it is men like him that are responsible for her death. He is caught in a bind of condemning the actions of the soldiers that murder Col, and partaking in the same brutal wartime activity. At one point in the play, the Soldier indicates that he is aware that there are a "[l]ot of bastard soldiers out there"(38), suggesting the bind in which he finds himself as both the perpetrator and victim (via the murder of his girlfriend) of such violence. He paradoxically expresses concern that Cate is in danger of being raped, while intending to rape her himself.

However, that is only one way in which the Soldier's actions might be interpreted. In *Blasted*, acts of rape serve the dual purpose of false witness and as an

example of the way in which gendered war crimes are weapons of war that immobilize women by diminishing their morale and security by making them " 'booty' of war" (Copelon 197). By bearing false witness, the soldier repeats the trauma and continues the agenda of male-gendered violence, positively reinforced through the taking of "booty." Rape is necessitated by the Soldier's misguided desire to bear false witness, an act that reveals the inherent sex discrimination in *Blasted*'s society. Kane dramatizes the process by which domestic rape can expand and become a public concern as a weapon of war. Rape transposes quite easily from a domestic situation to a societal scale because the precedent for such acts has already been well established by men such as Ian in domestic situations.

In *Blasted*, rape is presented in yet another dimension of power and control: the Soldier's rape of Ian. Unlike the invisible rape of Cate, Kane presents Ian's rape in plain view, rendering it as trauma that is obvious and definable. Its impact on the victim is immediately apparent. In the absence of concrete evidence of what exactly happened to Cate, the audience or readers may be unwilling or resistant to believe that rape is what has occurred. Even though it is clear that intercourse has taken place, it would be easy to believe conservative arguments that posit that Cate had consented on the basic level by showing up in the hotel room in the first place, or that because she had been Ian's lover at one time that she eventually consented. As opposed to Cate's rape, the audience bears a kind of witness to Ian's experience of rape implied through Kane's suggested staging. I think that Kane is making the point that, due to the absence of evidence of Cate's rape, the audience is unable and perhaps even unwilling to bear witness for her. The point that Kane makes in choosing to stage it in such a way has something to do with Dworkin's

inflammatory theory that "crimes against females are ultimately viewed as expressions of male normalcy, while crimes against men and boys are viewed as perversions of that same normalcy" (Dworkin 56), and therefore, more horrific. If the rape of Ian is troublesome and the rape of Cate is not, then according to the underlying moral outrage displayed in the play, it is because society unquestioningly accepts the sexual vulnerability and rape of women as normal. Kane's staging of this phenomenon seems to be as extreme as Dworkin's theory of these incidents.[22] Additionally, all the rapes that occur reflect the fact that rape, as a tactic of war, is an attempt to exert power over the enemy's women, and the enemy. As such, it has always been an expected, accepted, economical and effective form of terrorism against women. Arguably, and horrifically, rape has been so mainstreamed by pornography[23] and popular media portrayals of rape, that it is difficult for the general population to remember that rape is first and foremost a violent crime. Whether Kane intended to make this type of statement in her play or not,

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[22] While I do not agree with all of Dworkin's theories of sexual politics, I am drawing upon Dworkin's theories here despite the fact that they are often considered extremist and overly inflammatory. The content of Kane's play is extreme and inflammatory and so Dworkin's extreme theory lends itself well to a reading of Kane's play. Kane is not providing a tepid foray into this topic. Her plays are extreme and are based in an extreme view of injustice. While Dworkin's work may not necessarily reflect mainstream American sexual politics, it seems as though her work reflects the extreme situations that the reader and audience are confronted with in *Blasted*.

[23] Pornography remains a genre that has proved exceedingly difficult to define. It has flippantly defined by Justice Potter Stewart thusly: "'I don't know what it is, but I know what it is when I see it'" (Williams 5). More liberally, Walter Kendrick, author of *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture,* refuses to define pornography beyond the following: "pornography is simply whatever representations a particular dominant class or group does not want in the hands of another less dominant class or group. Those in power construct the definition of pornography through their power to censor it" (12). Linda Williams offers the following definition, one which I will take as the definition of pornography whenever I refer to that genre of cultural production: "the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing viewers" (30).

rape is clearly being purported as the foundation for and "the defining paradigm of sexuality" (62) in *Blasted.*

Dworkin's theory refers to the way in which the "scapegoating of women and the sexual exploitation of less powerful males"(62) is used to reassert and reaffirm dominant male status in a society that values and encourages sexual predation. I believe Kane is staging a theory similar to that of Dworkin. *Blasted* may be Kane's expression of an awareness of the extent of these types of atrocities that had been committed in the Bosnian war crisis, but are also to be found in British mainstream society. The effectiveness of her portrayal of such methods to elicit shock and discussion are a testimony to her awareness.

Furthermore by relocating the site/sight of rape from Cate to Ian, Kane is reminding the audience that rape is an act of violence, something that tends to be forgotten because of dominant misogynist perceptions of female sexuality. Instead, she portrays the consequences of rape so that there is no doubt that such an act is violent and destructive. Kane is addressing an audience that has been numbed by the mainstreaming of pornography, or by the effect of pornography's influence in mainstream film and drama that displays "force" as erotic (Dworkin 164). In *Blasted*, rape is portrayed as the violence that it is, but also draws the readers' attention to acts of sexual violence. Audiences might be disgusted by the sheer brutality of the manner in which Kane chose to represent this issue, but I believe that she represented it in a way that was purposefully inflammatory in order to draw attention to the danger of eroticizing violence. Her representation is also an attack on the complacency of society toward sex crimes, the

result of witnessing, without action, the horror of that which has become dangerously acceptable.

The Soldier is representative of the institutionalized, legitimized violence of the military. He is an agent of destruction that is thinly disguised as fighting for an idealistic greater good. Kane does not bother to define specifically what the war is about. Soldiers generally are understood as fighting for nationalism, for freedom, and for ideals. To whom that freedom and ideals belong to depends on which side of the battle lines one is standing on. Armies' actions in achieving their ends are rarely scrutinized by the general public in the way in which Kane dramatizes warfare by creating and staging an individual from a large collective such as the military. An examination of Ian's character further reveals the process by which violence is institutionalized and legitimized.

Ian is a white, male, middle-class cliché. He is the anti-hero who is "petty, ignominious, ineffectual." He is a character "stripped of certainties, values, or even meaning" (Abrams 214). He is self-destructive as much as he is a destructive force. He drinks too much, and smokes too much; he is dying of privileged consumer consumption and, paradoxically, is wasting away due to excess and ignorance. He is a threatening combination of all that is repellent and deserving of pity. Kane says of Ian: "of course I think he is a monster; I also think he's great" (Sierz 103).[24] Kane's ambiguous attitude toward Ian's type of character is evident in the manner in which Ian's character has the

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[24] His character is apparently based "on 'a terrible moral dilemma' that arose 'when a man I knew who was dying of lung cancer was terribly ill, and started telling me the most appalling racist jokes I've ever heard'. Kane was completely torn, a) because they were very funny, and very good jokes, b) because I wanted to tell him I thought he was awful and I was glad he was dying of lung cancer; and c) because he was dying of lung cancer, I thought: 'This poor man is going to be dead and he probably wouldn't be saying this if he wasn't'" (103).

ability to primarily elicit repulsion and, eventually, pity in audience members, reduced and humiliated as he is at the end of the play.

Ian's physical symptoms are theatrical manifestations of deeper social ills, specifically, gender power maintained by violence, sexual or otherwise. Ian clearly takes advantage of Cate. Again, Dworkin provides a useful, if extreme theory through which to view the situation Kane has created: "Men do not believe that rape or battery are violations of female will in part because men of influence have consumed pornography in the private world of men for centuries [...] otherwise thoughtful men have been educated about women and sex through pornography, which they see as hidden, forbidden sexual truth [...] that sexual violence is desired by the normal female, needed by her"(Dworkin . 166). I propose that Kane presents similar extreme views in *Blasted* as Dworkin's even if she does not articulate them as contentiously as Dworkin does. This exact attitude as described by Dworkin is evident in Ian's character.

Ian as a desensitized male is oblivious to Cate's needs, which renders him abusive. He takes advantage of Cate whenever possible. An example is the scene in which Cate "faints" and the stage direction stipulates: "*He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex. As he comes,* ***Cate*** *sits bolt upright with a shout*" (Kane 27). Staging the scene with Ian holding a gun to Cate's head, Kane simultaneously portrays the violence with which Ian exercises power over Cate and demonstrates to the audience the proximity of the occurrence of sex and death in what is being portrayed in

Blasted as mainstream conventional attitudes.[25] Not only is Ian taking sexual advantage of Cate but also, he is threatening her life, all the while that she is unconscious; Cate's unconscious state is arousing for Ian. This act of rape at gunpoint doubles and re-enacts the rape that occurred between scenes and out of view. If the audience was unsure as to whether or not Ian was an aggressive male predator, this repeated act of rape leaves little doubt. By doubling the counts of rape in the play, Kane not only increases the frequency of sexual violence, she ups the ante in that this rape also features the gun as a complicated signifier of the postmodern fusion of sex and violence. Aesthetically, the gun becomes a phallic substitute for the literal phallus in this act of simulated sex; sex is violence, sex is a gun that oscillates between being a literal/ figurative gun/penis held to the head of Cate, in a society in which heterosexual roles are violently imposed and enacted.[26] The presence of a gun demands submission, even within a paradigm of fantasy role-playing. It

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[25] The link between sex and death can be noted within language itself. For example, in French an organism is commonly referred to as a *petit mort*. Georges Bataille has also written extensively on the connection between life, sex, and death. In a chapter devoted to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* Bataille claims that "death seems to be the truth of love, just as love is the truth of death"; that, "eroticism [is the] approval of life, up until death" and that "sexuality implies death, not only in the sense in which the new prolongs and replaces that which has disappeared, but also in that the life of the being who reproduces himself is at stake" (4). See also Bataille's *Guilty* 12-13, 31, *On Nietzsche* 70, and *The Tears of Eros* 32-3.

[26] A gun, according to So-Cal dominatrix Ilsa Strix "shoots, it's long, it's hard, it has something inside of it that's going to erupt. It's an archetype" (Gates); in other words, the gun's association with masculine sexual energy is inherent in the gun. Guns are generally coded as strictly part of the male domain; they represent male sexuality and male aggression, except in some pornography. To radical anti-gun people, the gun is a phallic symbol, an "evil phallus that penetrates and rapes" (Gates). In fetish culture, the gun can be handled effectively by a femme fatale; in these scenarios, the women who handle guns do so with knowledge confidence and power. The guns and their female operators are sexy (think Bond girls, Nikita, etc.) However, in Kane's scenario, the gun is a direct threat to Cate's safety; she is neither sexy nor powerful, nor can she effectively use the firearm.

is tempting to read Ian as a phallic prisoner of Freud, a violent remnant of what is, in postmodern terms, an example of the crisis of ideological fallacy (phallacy?) of the myth of late-capitalist ideologies. Ian legitimizes and enforces his nefarious power through a symbol of violence.

Further evidence of Ian's predilection for eroticized violence can be found in the way that Kane constructs Ian as a type of pornographer in the guise of a journalist. This aspect of Ian is first revealed in the story that he wires to a newspaper over the phone. While this story is not sexually explicit *per se*, it contains a few key elements of pornographic material that when coupled with later elements in the play renders it as an attempt to eroticize violence, if it does not actually qualify as pornography. His gives a graphic description of the murder technique, followed by a detailed description of the girl in question: "Samantha, a beautiful redhead with dreams of becoming a model…"(12). The description of the victim as a "beautiful redhead" is hardly necessary to the news story. The news, and the tragedy, in this story are that a person was killed not that it was specifically a young beautiful female. By adding the physical description, Ian has rendered the victim as an erotic subject. For men such as Ian, she represents the ultimate heterosexual sexual fantasy of the passive female object in her victimhood. Furthermore, the erotic potency of this type of reportage reveals Ian's underlying misogynistic (and by proxy, society's) attitudes and a predilection for sex that has a connection to, and culminates in, violence or death. This tendency is exemplified again when Ian reads, to the soldier, a story he has written:

> Kinky car dealer Richard Morris drove two teenage prostitutes into the country, tied them naked to fences and whipped them with a belt before

having sex. Morris, from Sheffield, was jailed for three years for unlawful sexual intercourse with one of the girls, aged thirteen. (48)

The intercourse involved two teenaged prostitutes, one who was underage. This is the crime. Rather than simply reporting the facts, the story contains much extraneous information, such as a graphic description of what the perpetrator did to the girls before intercourse, which renders the story as thinly disguised pornography and worse, paedophiliac porn, rather than news. Ian describes the car dealer as "kinky," which implies that the car dealer's tastes are simply unusual, rather than criminal, and that aside from the unfortunate involvement of an underage girl, he is actually a pretty harmless guy. Furthermore, "unlawful sexual intercourse" is a euphemism for rape, which is belied by the three-year sentence that Richard Morris received for his "kinky" crime. That rape is glossed over, is submerged beneath the pornographic spectacle, is further evidence of Kane's concern with the increasing prevalence and proximity of violence to sex.

Additionally, the story was not written with the primary intent of providing news to the public but rather to provide a voyeuristic, illicit, and titillating representation of an erotically violent event for an audience of men like Ian. I argue that in this scene, Kane criticizes the media for conventionalizing acts of violence as entertainment, thereby eroticizing violent criminal acts. The result of such practice is a general desensitization of the public toward issues of sexual crime. The seriousness of the rape that has occurred has been subsumed beneath the spectacle; according to Ian's article rape is, in Kane's postmodern scene, simply "kinky."

When the Soldier asks Ian to write a story about him, he tells the Soldier he only writes stories about "[s]hootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and

schoolteachers. Not soldiers screwing each other for a patch of land. It has to be… personal. Your girlfriend, she's a story" (48). There is an emphasis on sexual violation in Ian's criteria as evidenced by his interest in the violent rape and murder of the soldier's girlfriend as a worthy story. Again, I am proposing that Ian finds it worthy because it contains all the elements commonly found in mainstream pornography. Comments such as, "[s]he's soft and clean"(48), reveal a tendency to classify women according to a type of Madonna/whore categorization. Col's "soft and clean" purity is, for men like Ian, the perfect site upon which to eroticize sexual violence. In fact the purity, within this paradigm, that according to Kane's play is a lamentably conventional one, demands violation. Kane is using the biases Ian displays in order to further her exploration of the forces that sustain sex crimes. In this incident Ian senses the type of story that titillates readers and therefore sells newspapers. Kane inflicts images upon her audience that may seem extreme or excessive, but in actual fact are very close to some women's experiences and are surely to be found within her audience's very own society. A man like Ian is contrasted with the soldier as his polar opposite, but I believe that Kane wants her audience to see them on a continuum as the same sort of violent man. Despite the similarity between Ian's attitudes towards women, sex and violence, and the Soldier's, Ian resists the Soldier's attempts to create a masculine alliance. For example, the Soldier attempts to engage Ian in a typical exchange of sexual exploits: "You got a girlfriend… When was the last time you--?" (42). Ian tries to resist by refusing to engage in the Soldier's game, and bluntly saying to the Soldier, when he starts to detail his last sexual conquest: "Don't tell me" (43). Later Ian states that if he had ever engaged in something as violent as the rape and slaughter similar to what the Soldier proceeds to describe, that

he "[wouldn't be able] to sleep with myself" (43). What becomes apparent at the end of this conversation is that what the Soldier wants to engage in is an exchange of rape narrative, rather than simply sexual exploits. The Soldier asks Ian: "Didn't you ever--," a sentence that suddenly breaks off before he says "rape." Ian is aware of the implication and in his silence, perhaps signifies shame or remorse, and then justification of his superior morality in his retort that "You did four in one go, I've only ever done one" (44). Despite Ian's attempt to see himself as different from the soldier, Kane is clearly drawing the comparison, and highlighting similarities. There is no such thing as degrees of rape: rape is rape.

In this scene, which occurs near the near the top of scene two, Kane portrays the tendency for certain males to experience sexual arousal from violence. Cate has fainted, with the gun in her hand, and Ian takes the gun and points it at Cate's head. He proceeds to theatrically rape Cate. At the point of his orgasm, Cate awakens. He has two options in this paradigm of violently imposed male sexuality proposed by Kane in *Blasted*: he can rape her or kill her; they exist alongside each other on a spectrum of violence. In this scene, and in the following scenes, the gun will continue to play a very important role. Not only does it carry weight as a phallic symbol of male power, violence, and domination, its role is doubly violent in that its phallic domination is also paired with its function as a weapon of war. It becomes the definitive symbol of male power; whichever male possesses the gun, also possesses supreme power. Ian's violent domination of Cate at gunpoint is, according to *Blasted*'s paradigm of male sexuality, an expression of male sexuality as inherently violent that is considered normal. Kane has carefully constructed this aggressive male "normalcy" in the preceding scenes in which Ian uses every trick in

the book to coerce Cate into having sex with him. He even manages to convince her to bring him to ejaculation through guilt: "Don't give me a hard-on if you're not going to finish me off. It hurts [...] Can't switch it on and off like that. If I don't come my cock aches" (Kane 15).

As Ian dominates and rapes Cate at gunpoint, Kane creates an image that demonstrates perfectly the fusion of eroticism and violence. The use of the gun as a prop, which reinforces male dominance, is a common trope in much mainstream, heterosexual pornography. It is a hyper-phallic representation of male sexuality and male sexual power in its extreme and absolute domination, a subject upon which predictably, Dworkin offers commentary. Dworkin's extreme stance on this particular issue seems to work very well when applied to Kane, whose writing and approach to her own subject matter is also extreme. Dworkin cites the gun in pornography as a symbol of "erection," male power in its full force, but also male power as it is directly correlated with violence. [27] As such, in *Blasted*, violence becomes the stimulus for sexual encounter. It is brought prominently into that frame of reference, once again, when this same sexual violence is being enacted between men. When the Soldier uses the gun as a way to exert power over Ian, and force him into sexual submission, Kane is presenting the same male will-to-power that Ian exercised over Cate. That the gun is the ultimate symbol of male power, and violence is brought to its logical conclusion when the Soldier uses the gun to kill himself. The

[27] Certainly gun as phallic symbol is evidenced by such sexual commodities as the "Erotic Gunslinger" vibrator (see Gates, *The Position* for an image of this device: white, revolver - shaped vibrator), a substitute phallus, that as vibrator is really only useful in the hands of a woman who is in control of her own sexual desires, and can function as both the phallic operator and recipient of conventional phallic pleasure.

Soldier's suicide is an act of power that has gone out of control, he is consumed by his own power, and *Blasted*'s society is completely at the mercy of this rampaging power, directed by violence and experienced invariably as sexual violation.

Further evidence in support of the correlation between the gun, violence and male sexuality early in Kane's play, is the manner in which the gun is so uselessly and precariously handled by Cate. Despite the gun's automatic symbol of power, Cate is unable to assume power while it is in her possession. Girls with guns in gun porn and other sexual fantasies can be powerful images of strong females who have wrested power from a historically male dominated activity. Guns, "man made machines[…] have attained talismanic status [in the United States and elsewhere] that bears sexual interpretation […] popular films are filled with loving close-ups of weaponry, slo-mo 'cum shots' of bullets blasting from barrels, ripping into flesh and making deep, wet wounds" (Gates).[28] There is great concern on the part of Ian whenever she picks up the gun, as if the threat of the power she might be able to obtain while it is in her possession is imminent; Ian may fear the female capacity to become a phallic operator powerful enough to use a gun effectively. Accordingly, Ian cautions her: "Easy, easy, that's a loaded gun […] Catie come on […] You don't want an accident" (26). On a symbolic level, the gun becomes impotent in her possession; she is unable to use it. Also on a symbolic level, Cate's potential to handle the gun poses a threat to Ian's sexual supremacy should she become competent. His way of reaffirming his right to power, his

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[28] Gates also notes that guns have also produced two conflicting mythologies of manhood: the "romantic narrative of the rugged (male) […] feeding his family, competing against nature and defending himself from animals," and, an "apocalyptic drama in which innocent women and children are victims of (male) brutality."

status as phallus (evil phallus that penetrates and rapes) is meted out through the aforementioned rape at gunpoint.

Despite his best efforts to maintain control, Ian is rendered helpless and completely emasculated as the play progresses, initially symbolized by Ian's loss of power over the gun to the Soldier. The Soldier completely usurps Ian's position as sexually dominant male, firstly through the act of rape, secondly through the symbolic gesture of raping Ian with the gun itself. In this scene, the gun leaves the realm of metaphor and becomes the ultimate phallic symbol.[29] This scene also suggests an inevitable fusion between sex and violence in this world. Furthermore, it is another act of revenge for the Soldier's girlfriend, as evidenced by the Soldier's threat to Ian: "Bastard pulled the trigger on Col. What's it like"(49), suggesting that he might pull the trigger on Ian, but also asking Ian if he is experiencing any erotic pleasure in this moment of sex and violent rape. Clearly then, the gun's function is dual, perhaps even a schizophrenic *modus operandi* of sexual pleasure as sexual violence. There is no room for deliverance by the presence of the gun, the right to bear arms, or romantic justice in a world where humanity is at constant odds with nature. This is man against man, male aggression in a fight to the death, not for survival.

The Soldier's final performance of Ian's disempowerment is the removal of Ian's eyes. Mythically, blindness functions as a castrating gesture. Blinding is a common theme in high tragedy--Oedipus being perhaps the most memorable. However, Oedipus is responsible for putting out his own eyes after learning the truth of his identity and the

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[29] Here, rather than the gun being the "Erotic Gunslinger," phallic substitute for pleasure, the gun remains apocalyptic, deadly, and mortally violationary.

profundity of his actions.[30] In *Oedipus Rex*, the self-blinding not only emasculates and disempowers him as the mighty king, but serves as an act of both repentance and punishment. For Ian, the act of blinding also serves as both emasculation and a form of penitence, and as Kristeva says in her discussion of Oedipus: "it is neither eviration nor death" [...] which serves to ward off "opprobrium [...] Blinding is thus an image of splitting; it marks on the very body, the alteration of the self and clean into defiled – the scar taking the place of the revealed and yet invisible abjection" (84). Even though he is not responsible for enacting his own blinding, Ian's potency is diminished. Like Oedipus, Ian's masculinity, and his power through sexual domination, is no longer a threat.[31] Yet, unlike Oedipus, Ian is a knowing player in his own defilement. If Ian acts in a reviling manner, it is with knowledge that he does so, and therefore, Ian is not tragic in the same

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[30] Oedipus blinds himself by using the pins of his deceased wife/mother, symbolically making her responsible for his diminished power, by "holding her robes- and lifting them high, looking straight up into the points, he digs them down the sockets of his eyes, crying, 'You, you'll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused! Too long you looked on the ones you never should have seen, blind to the ones you longed to see, to know! Blind from this hour on! Blind in the darkness- Blind!'" (Sophocles 625).

[31] Kane admits that she borrowed the idea from an actual contemporary incident. She was reading "'Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs*, about football violence. There was an undercover policeman who was pretending to be a Manchester United supporter and he was found out. A guy attacked him, then sucked out one of his eyes, bit it off, spat it out on the floor and left him there. And I just couldn't...believe what I'd read; I couldn't believe that a human being could do this to another person. I put it in the play and everyone was shocked'" (Sierz 103). It is not the first time that Kane has pointed out the irony of the press's reaction to her plays. Indeed why should anyone be more shocked to see this act being portrayed in a play than a real life incident? Kane cites a similar instance when the critics were more outraged at the contents of Kane's play than a real life occurrence in which "'the actual rape and murder of a young girl'" (97), had taken place. The press gave her play more coverage than the real event. Again Kane is implying that the outrage had more to do with what was being represented than the fact that it was represented. Perhaps critics could not quite understand from where their outrage was originating. "'The only reason it's any more devastating than reading a newspaper...is that all the boring bits have been cut out'" (103).

way that Oedipus emblemises the tragic figure, Kristeva's "scapegoat, who having been ejected, allows the city to be freed from defilement" (84). Ian is willingly abject, a willing player in his own legacy of violence. There is no redemption offered to the world as a result of his suffering. Ian is the harbinger of the violence that ensues.

Blinding is also connected to shame. According to James Gilligan, a medical doctor working with the criminally insane in Massachusetts, asserts that the act of blinding one's victims is directly related to the desire to ward off shame. The word shame suggests the desire for concealment. Gilligan notes Darwin's observation that "under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment… An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those present" (64). Accordingly, the Soldier, in order to remedy his unbearable weight of shame, and inspired by the accumulation of the horrors he inflicted on women and men, and finally Ian, misguidedly blinds Ian so that he is unable to pass judgment upon the soldier. From this perspective, within this play the act of blinding, in my opinion, is as much a symbolic, ritualistic act as it is a physical act of violence.

Kane suggests that there is also a little bit of Shakespeare's character King Lear in Ian. She is reported to have said: "'There's a point at which I realized there was a connection with *King Lear*. And I thought: 'I'm writing about fatherhood. There's this scene where he goes mad; and there's this Dover scene with Cate when she unloads the gun--is she going to give him the gun or is she not?' And the only thing I didn't have is blindness'" (Sierz 102). In *King Lear*, when Goneril and Regan strip Lear of his dignity, to some extant he gets what he deserves for being "blinded" by false professions of love. Similarly, Gloucester, the actual victim of blinding, is "blinded" to truth by his own

hubris and insecurities. But the retributive acts against these pitiful old men are too much; the ensuing humiliation is excessive. Likewise the punishment inflicted upon Ian is purely excessive, and yet the punishment, as with Lear, and Gloucester, symmetrically fits the crime. Kane is drawing attention to this very tendency people might have of seeing someone like Ian as harmless, especially when juxtaposed with someone who has committed far worse crimes than Ian ever did. Although Ian is despicable, as Kane says, when juxtaposed to the Soldier, Ian "look[s] like a pussycat" (103). But to take this stance, to downplay his faults, his own violent actions, to follow this interpretation would insist that we forget that Ian is sexist, racist and, in fact, a rapist. He reminds us of this fact himself when he says to the Soldier: "You did four in one go, I've only ever done [raped] one" (Kane 44). Ian carries the potential of a larger violence, the type of violence that finds its full expression in the form of the type enacted by the soldier. Kane uses that analogy. She asked herself, "What could possibly be the connection between common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia," to which she answered, "One is the seed and the other is the tree. And I do think the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilization [...]" (Sierz 101).

Perhaps in Ian's humiliation, stripped of any remaining humanity, and reduced to the most abject existence in which he openly defecates on stage, and commits cannibalism is to be a found a man who, in his blindness, will hopefully finally see. Kane's play writes against this type of closure as well. Ian falls short of achieving this mark. However, the audience, through their exposure to an "experiential" theatrical display will hopefully "see" the truth of the matter. On the one hand, the similarity to *King Lear* is fleeting, and trivial--Ian is blinded in an act of bizarre and somewhat

random cruelty by someone not unlike himself. In a remotely similar fashion, *King Lear*'s Gloucester is cruelly and unjustifiably punished by an episode of blinding. To my mind, comparison to *King Lear* however, ends here. As Lear's eyesight grows dimmer, fading along with his grasp on reality, his inner sight grows, so that he comes to "see" the truth of Cordelia and the lies of Regan and Goneril. But Ian, fulfilling his role as anti-hero, in blindness becomes weak and helpless. He does not rise as a noble being; he dies in the abjection of his existence. Unlike *King Lear*, *Blasted* is not a typical morality tale. As Kane says, "'I find discussion about the morality of the play as inappropriate as the accusations of immorality. I've never felt that *Blasted* was moral. It doesn't sloganize'" (Sierz 104). It may not sloganize, but it certainly contains a sharp moral awareness.

In Ian's weakest and most desperate moment, raped, blinded, emasculated, teetering on the brink of death, Cate performs the final act of Ian's disempowerment. By removing the bullets from the gun, she enacts a metaphor for removing the seed from the phallus. She literally takes away from Ian even the ability to exercise power over his own mortality. He is completely at her mercy and, in the end, mercy is not what Cate demonstrates. And yet Cate is not victorious either. She goes back into the streets to "get some [food] off a soldier" (Kane 58). Her silence, when Ian asks her how she intends to do so indicates that she will be trading sex for food. Kane is playing with the language, punning with the sexual reference that "get some" under some circumstances could mean, "get some sex." There is no justice at the end of this play. The audience can not feel comfortable with the knowledge that Cate will be alright because the truth of the matter is that, as Kane stated in an interview, "'people like her never win'" (Sierz 103).

Returning to Kane's own remark, quoted in full above, which states that in Ian's character she is "'writing about fatherhood'" (Sierz 102) I argue that if this play is about fatherhood, then it is also about incest, and the violation of taboo. If Ian is to be understood as an archetypal father, and emblematic of masculinity in crisis, then his sexual coercion of Cate, who within this paradigm is logically the "daughter," is incestuous, or at the very least, sex between them becomes a form of cannibalism; sexual intercourse, as a metaphor, can also be understood as a "bodily image for incorporation" (Kilgour 7) and in the case of rape, can be logically posited as cannibalism. Drawing upon Kilgour's meditation on incorporation I further contend this on the grounds that "incorporation [...] is a process concerned with embodiment and the bringing of bodies together" (7), that incorporation is the taking of something outside and putting it inside the body, through a variety of means, an act that suggests a (sometimes violent) negotiation of borders, boundaries that define inside from outside. As such, incorporation always occupies a dangerous, slippery edge between abjection and incorporation. Kristeva contends that abjection can be identified as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules [...]The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good consciences, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (4). Whenever borders or boundaries are threatened, the abject looms as a potential effect. With the paradigm of bodily incorporation then, whenever something gets inside, or shifts to the outside, that should have remained where it was, the potential for an abject experience exists. I am devising a relationship between the metaphor of incorporation, as defined by Kilgour, and the presence of the abject in *Blasted.*

In this play, food becomes abject, as it rightly should under certain circumstances. In fact according to Kristeva, "Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). Furthermore, according to Kilgour "even the most apparently benign acts of eating involve aggression, even cannibalism" (7), the implication of which becomes apparent in *Blasted* when Cate reacts to the eating of ham as if it is human flesh. In *Blasted*, Cate expresses her extreme distaste over the presence of the ham sandwiches that Ian has sent to the room: "Ham. Don't believe it;" it's "Dead meat. Blood"; she "Can't eat an animal" (6-7). It is not simply "ham," but something "dead," something that once contained blood, and therefore life energy. Her threatened gag response situates this reaction to incorporation/cannibalism as a moment in which like Kristeva's "gagging sensation," the consumption of ham would inspire her to "puke all over the place" (7), or turn herself "inside out" (Kristeva 3); as with Kristeva, Cate's own physical "spasms and vomiting […] protect [her]" (2) from the violent encounter with abjection. Cate experiences abjection in the face of the sandwich meat, potentially crossing a border that it should not cross. Conversely, Ian blasphemes when he realizes there is cheese in his sandwich; the prospect of cheese, a non-threatening substance immediately restores Cate from her threatened abjection. Significantly, and symbolically, Ian is holding a "*rasher of bacon*" (36) when the Soldier enters the scene. Ian offers it to the Soldier, and the Soldier eats it, incorporates the offering. This scene serves as foreshadowing for the cannibalisation of Ian, and later Ian's cannibalising of the baby. In *Blasted*, meat, flesh, is an abject substance. Finally, it is also significant that at the end of the play, Cate "*eats her fill of sausage and bread, then washes it down with gin*" (61). No longer abjectly reactive to meat-- "flesh," and "blood," Cate joins the ranks of the abject

subjects in the play; as a prostitute she offers herself for a cannibalistic sex trade in order to procure sustenance.

Cate experiences other moments of abject bodily invasion when she "*begins to cough and retch. She puts her fingers in her throat and produces a hair. She holds it up and looks at* ***Ian*** *in disgust. She spits.*" (33) Cate's retrieval of the hair, Ian's hair, is a doubly abject encounter; not only is the hair something that the body should reject, something that got inside that should not be, but the hair is most likely a pubic hair, and so its proximity to sex, and sexual violation, renders the gagging response as a response that is violently abject, as opposed to a simple bodily reflex. The presence of the hair also refers back to the previous scene during which Cate has performed fellatio, an act that entails oral incorporation, blurring further the boundary between ingestion, cannibalism (Cate bites Ian's penis), and abjection. Prior to Cate's expulsion of the hair, Ian abjects himself, spitting himself out, with his "guts sprawling" (Kristeva 3), when he "*has a coughing fit. He spits into his handkerchief and waits for the pain to subside*" (Kane 33). Ian's body is literally expelling itself in his illness. That which should remain inside the body expels itself.

As mentioned earlier, sexual intercourse is also considered a form of incorporation, "which is often represented as a kind of eating" (7). As Kilgour points out, in French "to consume and to consummate are the same word" (7). The way in which rape transgresses boundaries against the will of the raped suggests that there is yet another similarity to be drawn between rape as sexual violence, and the same violation of borders that occurs during the abject act of forcible incorporation. Ian becomes Kristeva's abject "shameless rapist," when he forcibly rapes Cate between scenes, and again when

he rapes her as she lies unconscious at gunpoint (Cate as ultimate, passive, lump of female).

Ian not only enacts abjection he also experiences abjection as the Soldier forcibly "incorporates" the gun inside Ian's body. That which should remain outside the body achieves penetration, and violates Ian's corporeal borders. At this point I would also like to propose an alternate reading of the Soldier than has been offered to this point in this chapter. Drawing upon Kristeva's theory of the abject, I contend that the Soldier can alternatively be understood as the split alter ego of Ian. Kristeva explains the process whereby this occurs.

> It follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [on en jouit]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object *a* [Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims--if not its submissive and willing ones. (9)

The implication is that the Soldier can be read as a fractured, more repulsively violent aspect of Ian. The Solider is all the terrible things that Ian is not, cannot be, may fantasize about being, and yet neither is he Ian's opposite. The Soldier is an abject aspect of Ian. It does not even matter why this happens. What matters is that through various metaphors of violent incorporation, Ian becomes the abject object of the Soldier's own debased and criminal desire. For example, the Soldier as Ian's Other makes Ian "repugnant." He removes Ian's eyes, and in an act of cannibalism, ingests, incorporates Ian's vision. Kilgour cites Bakhtin's note that eating is a "'most material need yet is invested with a great deal of significance, an act that involves both desire and aggression, as it creates a total identity between eater and eaten while insisting on the total control--the literal consumption--of the latter by the former'" (7). The Soldier is hungry, but he does not ingest Ian's eyes for nurturance. The act is invested with far more significance. In fact, a literalization of the metaphor appears briefly in this scene; if the Solider is an aspect of Ian, then the fractured identities become reunited in such a manner as to confirm Feuerbach's frequently cited aphorism " you are what you eat." Furthermore, the act is not simply gustatory; it possesses a sexual essence, which serves to further blur the boundary between incorporation as cannibalism and incorporation as sex, as the Solider "*grips **Ian's** head in his hands. He puts his mouth over one of **Ian's** eyes, sucks it out, bits it off and eats it. He does the same to the other eye*" (Kane 50).

Additionally, such dismemberments recall other mythical instances in which tongues are removed and ingested, an occurrence that suggests "castration symbolism"

(Hanke 97). [32] Rather than manifesting as a lingual castration, the Soldier's desire for Ian, made explicit from his entrance, culminates in this phallic/ocular castration/incorporation.

Finally, Ian is left to perish in his abject state. Blind, left alone with the dead baby, and abandoned by both the Soldier and Cate, Ian finds himself in a situation in which, "as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show* [him] what [he] permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids [Ian is bleeding from the eyes], this defilement [Ian has cannibalised the baby], this shit [Ian has defecated on stage] are what life withstands [...] on the part of death" (Kristeva 3). [33] Ian finds himself at the border of the "condition as a living being" (3). More dead than alive, Ian makes a tomb for himself in the floorboards, a tomb which might also be a womb; Ian has ventured beyond the living at this point and in his abject abjection "falls beyond the limit," as "*cadere*, cadaver" (3).

There is a cycle of brutality in this play that is initiated through Ian's brutal and relentless sexual victimization of Cate, which enforces and confirms her inferior status. Ian as liberal citizen and privileged male is, in turn brutalized by the Soldier, which thereby reduces Ian's status, rendering him a victim of the same violent privilege that had once ensured his superiority. The Soldier, although a symbol of brutality, is eventually brutalized by his own agenda and becomes a victim of his own power that is contingent

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[32] In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Philomela is raped by her sister Procne's husband Tereus, who then cuts out Philomela's tongue, and is eventually fed the flesh of his son as an act of revenge. See Kilgour p. 33.See also Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* for a variation of this myth.

[33] Lévi-Strauss calls cannibalism "an alimentary form of incest" (Kilgour 33).

on violence. Finally, Cate whose very existence has been determined by the threat of violence has to live with the consequences of the dead baby, who is yet another victim of violence. The only thing Cate can think of doing is to offer a prayer for the baby, something that Kane must have intended to appear to be wholly inappropriate and weak, a comment perhaps on the futility of a society which persists in clinging to meaningless and ineffectual religious traditions. The prayer is more a wish list of things that Cate probably hopes for herself rather than being a prayer for the soul of the deceased baby: "Don't feel no pain or know anything you shouldn't [...] Don't see bad things or go bad places [...] Or meet anyone who'll do bad things" (Kane 57-8).

I believe the play's brutality is a dramatization of Kane's larger social concerns. Kane offers this belief: "'Once you have perceived that life is very cruel, the only response is to live with as much humanity and humour and freedom as you can'" (Sierz 107). This is exactly what Cate does. She buries the baby with as much compassion and dignity as the circumstances can afford. She does not lament the fact that she must prostitute herself for survival; she simply does it. If there is any hope to be found at the end of this play, as Kane insists there is, it is to be found in the determination that Cate musters to survive, a trait very much out of character for the Cate that the audience first encounters. This is a different girl than the one who has "fits" every time the situation gets stressful, or the girl who is taken advantage of by a perverse, ailing old hack. There is a refusal in the play, despite the desperate circumstances, to give in to despair; it would simply be too gratuitous to do so.

This play is not so much a complicated metaphor for Bosnia, or a postulation about the potential for civil strife within Britain, as it is an immediate representation of

the connection between private sexual violence, a war between individuals, and sexual violence as it manifests itself as a public war. How do we as readers, then, return to, and accept, Kane's statement regarding the play as "quite a peaceful play" (Woddis)? Is she toying with her audience, deliberately derailing them by making them search for meaning where in fact there is none? Or does this play contain an honest sentiment toward the ultimate effect that such a play might have on an audience. On the one hand, it would seem absurd to feel calm or be at peace at the end of such a depiction of inhumanity. On the other, if the play is ultimately peaceful, is it because it offers hope? The audience and reader are left to ponder the question as to wherein this hope can be found and what this hope is for.

In 1955, a production of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, a play that despite its status as Renaissance tragedy and not as postmodern drama, contains a comparable amount of unrelenting violence, was described as, "stark horror, unrelieved by pity; human agony pitched beyond endurance, until the victim becomes insane. The arbitrariness of the action seemed to symbolize the essential absurdity of modern life" (Cross in the *Pelican Shakespeare* 823). If *Titus Andronicus* spoke to a post-war theatre crowd regarding the basic incomprehensibility of modern existence, can *Blasted* speak to its audience in its own way? Arguably, this play proposes that the possibility of truth can be found in the most profoundly mad state of affairs. Perhaps the hope to which Kane refers and its companion, peace, can be found in the ability of an audience to recognize the connection between the private sexual violence of rape, and the public violence of war, and the proliferation of eroticized violence. If the audience can make that connection by facing the dramatized, stark reality of "human agony" in all its naked gore and

absurdity, if the audience can learn, then there is hope and ultimately, while not *about* peace, the play has the ability to teach peace.

Chapter Three

Phaedra's Love

> It is a will to nothingness, a will running counter to life, a revolt against the most fundamental presuppositions of life: yet it is and remains a will! And, to repeat at the end what I said in the beginning, rather than want nothing, man even wants nothingness. (Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morals* 28)

In *Blasted*, Kane struggled with presenting the abjection of humanity as a byproduct, or stimulus of an increasingly more violent world: the proliferation of war, and the realization that sexual violence is the norm in sexual relations. In *Phaedra's Love*, Kane continues her project of enquiry into cultural violence, only this time she poses questions as to the effectiveness of attempts to subvert violent and other social norms. At stake in *Phaedra's Love* are notions of identity, the ability to communicate and the effectiveness of that communication. It is a play of sadistic desire in which desire is transformed, or rather, mangled into violence, culminating in death by violent and public murder and private suicide. As such, *Phaedra's Love* also poses questions about sadism. As Arthur Kroker proposes in *The Postmodern Scene*, "sado-masochism, in the postmodern condition, is not what it used to be;" it is "a little sign-slide between the ecstasy of catastrophe and the terror of simulacrum as a (disappearing) sign of the times…what is sadism in the age of the hyperreal but the sense of living today on the edge between violence and seduction, between ecstasy and decay?" (vii). Indeed, Kroker's perceived edge between violence and seduction, and ecstasy and decay describes with uncanny accuracy the fragile negotiations of existence enacted by Kane's characters in *Phaedra's Love*. Kroker refers to Nietzsche's eloquent prophecy in which a "new dark age would be typified by passive nihilists, driven by despair over their own botched and bungled instincts towards predatory styles of behavior, and by

suicidal nihilists, who would always prefer to will nothingness rather than not will at all" (vi). According to Nietzsche, nihilism is "ambiguous"; it can be active "as a sign of increased power of the spirit," or passive, "decline and recession of the power of the spirit" (17). Nietzsche's conception of passive and suicidal nihilists anticipates Kane's characters Phaedra and Hippolytus. The former, too passive and overwhelmed by her own failure to satisfy desire, actively enacts suicide, the latter, also suicidally welcomes the perfect nothingness of his passive existence and the chaotic violence of his execution that is itself an elaborately staged suicide.

In my analysis of Kane's complicated play, which refers in oscillation to both mythical time and mythological origins and to Kane's own postmodern culture of decay, I provide a performance reception of this play, as well as provide an argument for the play's position in postmodernity as a signal that Kane's is a culture that is walking Arthur Kroker and David Cook's dangerous--suicidal--edge between ecstasy and decay, as delineated in *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper – Aesthetics*. Hal Foster's examination *in The Return of the Real* of abjective postmodernism and Kristeva's seminal meditation on abjection in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* serve as other primary interpretive tools.

Kane's second professionally produced play, *Phaedra's Love*, is based on Seneca's classical rendition, entitled *Phaedra*, which was in turn based on Euripides's Greek Hippolytus/Phaedra myth, entitled *Hippolytus*. In *Phaedra's Love* Kane maintains typical classical themes of love, revenge, death, and dramatic suicide while dispensing with the necessity of classical tragedy; the gods have neither interfered with, nor determined the affairs of humans in Kane's version. Kane sets the play in a contemporary time period and

alters the characters and plot to suit her own theatrical needs. I approach this text from the understanding that one of the cultural values of myth is to serve and reinforce the needs of the dominant order, in this case, patriarchy, a male-centred society in which the females are consistently subordinated to the will, power and presumed authority of the males. I believe that through her ironic use of mythology Kane seeks to expose contemporary British, social patriarchal dominance, and the monarchy and religion as violently corrupt. Significantly, Kane's play does not portray an exceptional society, but one with which the audience should be familiar. She mercilessly portrays objectionable, repulsive behavior in order to expose violence and, contradictorily, banality.[1] I discuss Kane's use of the traditional motif of false rape accusation, intertwined within her themes of revenge, illness, consumerism, and religion as a corrupt institution. Of further importance to my examination of the play is the manner in which Kane scrutinizes male and female sexualities, and juxtaposes morality with justice. I also consider the characters' chronic inability to experience pleasure and pain as they are enacted within the play. A discussion of the ways in which Brecht and Beckett may have influenced Kane in her dramatic conceptions is included as well as a comparison to Kane's contemporary Irvine Welsh's and his enormously popular book, play and film *Trainspotting*.[2] Since I did not have the opportunity to attend a performance of *Phaedra's Love*, I rely on Aleks Sierz's set descriptions for my brief analysis of production issues. My analysis, however, focuses primarily on the text.

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[1] Later, I will discuss presence of banality in *Phaedra's Love* in relation to Hannah Arnendt's study of banality.

[2] It is highly likely that Pinter was also influential to Kane, along with other experimental playwrights from the 1950's and 60's.

Like Kane's first play, *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* dramatizes extreme violence, exposing its traumatic effects on a postmodern society. The play is consistent with a foundational theme in Kane's oeuvre that posits postmodern existence as an essentially violent and traumatic experience; *Phaedra's Love* presents a set of characters whose dysfunction emerges from the traumatizing effects of their environment. These effects include a decreasing ability to communicate, decreasing personal stability due to a shattered totalized moral order, and an increase of violence as utility, or as a means to an end, most notably expressed through rape, murder, incest and suicide. *Phaedra's Love* is a reflection of social realities with all of their contradictions and irreconcilable gaps. As in other of Kane's works, a symptom of abiding violence, illness, especially psychological illness, surfaces in the character of Hippolytus, which provokes her audience. Her content not only explores forms of violence, but also performs literary violence upon her potential reading and theatrical audiences.

As a way to enter a deeper analysis later, I now offer a brief performance history and review of the play's critical reception in the London daily papers. *Phaedra's Love* was first performed at the Gate Theatre, London on 15 May 1996 (Kane 64), was self-directed, and lasted seventy minutes without a break (Sierz 108). Once again Kane chose to challenge her audience with the grueling experience of a complex play without a break from relentless theatrics. As with *Blasted*'s premiere, Kane faced negative reception from the theatre critics. In his review, critic Charles Spencer raised the issue of Kane's mental well being, writing that "It's not a theatre critic that's required here, it's a psychiatrist" (108). For the most part, however, the press responded with what appeared to be an adolescent fixation on certain scenes rather than evaluation of the theatrical merit, social relevance or potential seriousness

of the play. Sierz notes: "as Hippolytus's genitals were flung the length of the theatre, several people laughed. More 'in-yer-lap', wrote critic David Nathan, 'than in-yer-face'" (108). Although such a scene might make people uncomfortable merely for its sheer crassness, Kane's greater point of audience challenge--by implication through either revulsion or laughter, or both--is lost on these reviewers. Evidently, Kane's professional career is establishing a pattern of audience confrontation: she demands that her audiences contemplate radical and at times outrageous moments that offend traditional theatrical expectations. Most audiences do not have a precedent upon which to draw in order to react accordingly. Kane dares her audience to gaze upon things that run counter to accepted norms in order to consider these issues from a different perspective, as a way of deconstructing power structures, and a mode of being in the world. By breaking outmoded codes of politeness, Kane violently forces the audience to take a stance on issues they may not have previously considered.

Despite what seemed to be a general lambasting in the daily newspaper reviews, a minority of critics were willing to recognize that there may be something more socially relevant at work in her play than an adolescent desire to shock. For example, Samantha Marlowe recognized that Kane "'challenges theatrical conventions in a witty, intelligent and mischievous fashion', while… Kate Stratton said the play 'blows raspberries at an unmistakable British society captured in galloping decay'" (108). From my overview of the critical reception, it seems that most critics were unable to distance themselves emotionally

from their reaction to the play's subject matter.[3] They tended to fixate solely on the crude representations in the play rather than realizing that the crudity is an aesthetic demanded by this type of theatre and functions as a vehicle for Kane's social criticism. One might even describe her theatre as a homeopathy; she uses the disease to fight the disease. The play's inherent irony seems to have fallen by the wayside, with much of the critical writing focusing instead on the author rather than the production.

Whether *Phaedra's Love* is part of a committed agenda of liberating staid English values or simply the latest theatrical offering of a trendy desire to shock for the sake of shocking, it has made an impact on the British playwriting scene. Again, it seems that the negative reception of the play emanates from the fact that the critics' own values were at odds with the play's postmodern cultural criticism and aesthetics. Throughout this chapter, I approach this play as if it is an effort to break through the traditional mould of conventional theatre, and to present social issues in a very frank and in-yer-face manner. How far the impact this play made on trends in playwriting will extend will only be known in the years to come.

Kane explains her decision to adapt Seneca's play in a rather simplistic manner, which I believe indicates postmodern desire for rebellion against the constraints of

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[3] Ibsen also faced ferocious resistance from the critics. Professor Bjørn Hemmer writes: "For a period of many hard years, he faced bitter opposition. But he finally triumphed over the conservatism and aesthetic prejudices of the contemporary critics and audiences. More than anyone, he gave theatrical art a new vitality by bringing into European bourgeois drama an ethical gravity, a psychological depth, and a social significance which the theatre had lacked since the days of Shakespeare. In this manner, Ibsen strongly contributed to giving European drama a vitality and artistic quality comparable to the ancient Greek tragedies" ("The Dramatist Henrik Ibsen" *Odin: Norway in English.* http://odin.dep.no/odin/engelsk/index-b-n-a.html , July 13, 2003.)

classicism, in an interview in Sierz: "'because Caryl Churchill had done a version of one of [Seneca's] plays, Thyestes, which I liked very much.'" She "'read Seneca's version only once and didn't look at either Euripides' version or Racine's until after she'd finished her play.'" Kane said that she "'wanted to keep the classical concerns of Greek theatre--love, hate, death, revenge, suicide--but use a completely urban poetry'" (Sierz 109). In Seneca, the triangle is between king, wife and stepson. Seneca's Hippolytus character is a chaste devotee of the Roman goddess Diana and adamant that he will never succumb to female seduction. He has angered the goddess Venus because of his singular devotion to Diana; his refusal to acknowledge the goddess of love as anything but a harlot is responsible for him having been cursed. Seneca's Phaedra is a foreign temptress and therefore is understood to lack moral judgement and social decorum and thereby cannot resist attempting to seduce her stepson. In adapting the story for her play, Kane maintained most of the tale's essential characteristics with a few modern substitutions, as well as additions and subtractions of characters. The most important difference between Seneca's and Kane's versions is that Seneca's play is still grounded in a mythic tradition. As Ahl notes of Seneca,

> Senecan characters are not just fictions of the poet's imagination. Nor are they simply traditional mythic figures in a conventional literary environment over whose shape and behaviour the writer has little or no control. They are poetic fictions built upon myths whose general significance was widely known among Greeks and Romans, even those with a minimal education. (35)

Kane managed to free her version from that burden of classical mythology, while leaving intact the mythological references. While Seneca's characters still bear all the weight with which their names, their birth histories and family histories are endowed, and fates are pre-

determined by the gods, Kane's characters exist in the ahistorical, secular, anonymity of a modern urban landscape.

Kane uses the classical themes of Seneca's version of the myth, mutating it to a modern context equally concerned with the issue of unrequited love: revenge. Looking briefly at the classical tradition, I will show how mythical memory serves to remind that the legacy of rape is inscribed in the mythical tradition of Theseus, Hippolytus's father. According to classical scholars Graves, Ahl and Gerard, Theseus rapes Hippolytus's mother, who was queen of the Amazons, named Hippolyta (or Antiope), as part of his war booty in the Aegeans' expedition against the Amazons (Graves 100). After she gave birth to Hippolytus, Theseus killed her (Ahl 38). In the classical tradition, Hippolytus's name is thought to mean something akin to "the man destroyed by horses--a name that is an omen of his doom" (38).[4] It makes literary sense that as the son of rape, Hippolytus's legacy as the falsely accused rapist should be left intact in Kane's play. His fate, despite the falseness of the accusation, is preordained and inevitable. In the context of the traditional renditions of the myth, the legacy of rape serves as an expression, validation and continuation of male power enacted as fate. Kane seems to presume that those familiar with the mythic tradition will make that connection in her work.

Kane's version of the play can be summarized as follows: The play opens with a dumb show during which the audience observes Hippolytus as a grungy slob of a character who eats too much junk food and is a chronic masturbator. His stepmother, Phaedra, is concerned about his well-being and has solicited the opinion of the royal doctor, whose

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[4] In Seneca's rendition, a giant monster summoned from the sea by Theseus, through a prayer to his father Aegeus, spooks Hippolytus' horses, which proceed to throw him from the chariot, trample and drag his body until he is ingloriously impaled on a tree stump.

assessment, while an accurate description, is inadequate in fulfilling Phaedra's desire to find a solution to Hippolytus's problem as she perceives it. Aside from the postulation that Hippolytus is possibly depressed, no other diagnosis is made. The doctor suggests, in a moment of theatrical foreshadowing, that perhaps Hippolytus's problem resides within Phaedra as opposed to her stepson. In the confessional scene between Phaedra and her daughter, Strophe, the audience discovers that Phaedra has not seen her husband, Theseus, for a very long time and is obsessively in love/lust with Hippolytus. In the next scene the audience learns that it is Hippolytus's birthday and for his birthday present Phaedra intends to seduce Hippolytus, against the warnings of Strophe and despite Hippolytus's apparent lack of interest in her. In fact, he insults her deeply during this bedroom scene, and further humiliates her after she has performed fellatio. Scene five opens with Strophe warning Hippolytus to hide because Phaedra has accused him of rape and committed suicide. Hippolytus is jailed because he refuses to attempt to avoid the consequences of his behavior, by admitting his guilt and confessing the sin. The jail scene ends with Hippolytus performing fellatio on the Priest, who attempts to secure an admission of the crime and spiritual confession, which Hippolytus refuses to provide. Theseus returns in time to light Phaedra's funeral pyre and vows to "kill" Hippolytus. Unbeknownst to each other, Theseus and Strophe both end up, disguised, in a crowd awaiting Hippolytus's execution. A skirmish breaks out and Theseus unwittingly rapes and kills Strophe. A woman from the crowd then cuts off Hippolytus's genitals, which are then accidentally, and ingloriously tossed upon a barbecue. Theseus disembowels Hippolytus and then slits his own throat when he realizes that he has raped his stepdaughter, Strophe. The play ends with the nearly impossible stage direction: "*A vulture descends and begins to eat his* [Hippolytus's] *body*" (Kane 103).

Like *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* is written in a traditional style of play script, with characters, stage directions and scenes clearly defined. However, there is less attention paid to the details of the play's setting than in *Blasted*. Instead, the attention focuses upon blocking and staging concerns. According to Sierz's descriptions, the original production's set, designed by Vian Curtis,

> occupied the whole of this tiny theatre, leaving the audience perched on benches in the middle and on the edges of the room. The atmosphere was hot, claustrophobic. With the action happening all around, the feeling was one of eavesdropping on a problem family. While Hippolytus wallowed at one end of the set, messing about with a remote-controlled car, Phaedra brushed past audience members as she approached him (108).

This set, as described by Sierz, creates the opportunity for intimate and personal staging, and incorporates the audience within the performance by literally placing them within that staging. As Kane states, "the play could be at one moment intimate and personal, at the next epic and public [...] And since the play becomes more and more public, that's an entirely appropriate experience to have" (108-09). This production's staging thus demanded that the audience be uncomfortably implicated in the play by the sheer proximity of audience to actors. However, since this staging is not explicitly called for in the script, the play can be staged in alternative ways. One might argue that, since Kane was also the director, this production should be taken as the definitive performance, yet since Kane as playwright did not include detailed set descriptions within the play text, it is arguable that no definitive performance exists.

I will now discuss the way in which the theatre and theatrical concerns of Kane's work fits in with the traditions of two of her own self-professed influences, Brecht and Beckett. I also evaluate where *Phaedra's Love* departs from the theatrical philosophy of these influential writers, resulting in a new genre of tragic form. It is interesting to note that, at their debuts, Brecht's and Beckett's plays, like Kane's, were each met with substantial resistance, and have survived to become the acceptable standards of modern theatre.

Brechtian innovation reveals itself in *Phaedra's Love* through Kane's strategies of epic sensibility, audience alienation, and stylized performance. This alienation effect, an effect which seeks to defamiliarize aspects of common reality so that the audience is forced to consider these realities in a fresh and novel manner, is present in most of Kane's work, but in particular in *Phaedra's Love*, and functions to distance the audience from the action in order to promote its critical stance to the issues. In *Phaedra's Love* Kane works toward a type of epic theatre in the Brechtian tradition as evidenced by the way *Phaedra's Love* inevitably inspires a critique of the social realities, both within and outside the play. Furthermore, the play becomes more and more public as the plot progresses, thereby implicating the audience in the catastrophic outcome. At the same time as drawing in the audience so as to implicate, Kane invokes Brecht's methods of alienation by distancing the "time, place and nature of the action" (Mack 1906). The dual effect in *Phaedra's Love* is an oscillation between ancient Greece and contemporary Britain, myth and contemporary society, suggesting both frames while residing in neither. This technique allowed Brecht to engage his audience while pushing them back (1906). Similarly, Kane asks her audience to draw upon their knowledge of classical literature while considering their own contemporary society.

Kane's own statement of artistic vision demonstrates that like Brecht, she strives, through her plays, to effect social awareness and changes within individuals:

> If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched. And anyone…who attempts to give people that imaginative experience faces defensive screams that it's too much […] It's crucial to chronicle and commit to memory events never experienced-in order to avoid them happening […] I'd rather risk defensive screams than passively become part of a society that has committed suicide. (Kane qtd. in Stephenson and Langridge 133) [5]

This ironic statement may seem merely alarmist about future events, but may also be an eerie omen of the circumstances in which Kane will eventually find herself, or is partially responsible for driving her to commit suicide. *Phaedra's Love* depicts examples of human suffering, fulfilling Kane's quest to provide her audience with a life changing experience. However, Kane refrains from offering any solutions; potential readers or audience must arrive at their conclusions as to how to remedy social ills.

Another Brechtian alienation technique found in *Phaedra's Love* is Kane's discouragement of "total identification with the characters," which in turn forces the audience to "think critically about what is taking place" (Mack 1909). This may seem to be

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[5]Brecht developed a theory of theatre as instructive in "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction." Brecht contends that epic theatre holds the potential to motivate social change, through the use of the alienation affect: "The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it--That's not the way--That's extraordinary, hardly believable--It's got to stop--The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary--That's great art: nothing obvious in it--I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh" (71).

fairly standard practice in modern theatre; however, Kane seems to be especially faithful to Brecht's theory. Kane's characters are more accurately understood as types, or personas that happen to be embodied in flesh. As such, Hippolytus's body for example, is more akin to postmodern conceptions of the self as "an empty sign [...] energized from within by a novel psychological condition--the schizoid state of postmodern selves who are (simultaneously) predators and parasites" (Kroker vii). I will delve more deeply into Kane's particular character constructions and their effects later in this chapter.

To underscore how other contemporary plays fall short of achieving such an alienation effect, despite the tendency to read it as a necessary component of the Cool Britannia movement, I will briefly compare Kane with Irvine Welsh and his book, play, and film, *Trainspotting*.

In this novel/play and film, Welsh depicts five disenfranchised twenty-something year olds who wrestle with their heroin and/or alcohol addictions in a post-Thatcher Scotland. The main character, Mark Renton, kicks his heroin addiction only to make a conscious decision to start using again. The novel depicts the "friends'" attempts to integrate into their society and their inability or unwillingness to do so on society's consumeristic terms. In the end, Renton cheats his friends by stealing the windfall of cash they made selling inexpensive heroin to petty gangsters. He vows to be setting out on a journey to join the established society by setting himself up with a house, a job, a family, DIY, television, and numerous other signposts of capitalist success. One has the impression that he is endeavouring to "choose life," a phrase that earlier in the novel was mocked as indicative of all the things Renton and his friends adamantly rejected. Welsh fails to alienate his film

audience in particular from the endearing heroin-addicted characters of *Trainspotting*.[6] In fact, he achieves the opposite. He creates a cast of characters who invite envious fantasy identification to the point where this youthful heroin subculture becomes fashionable, desirable, and something to be mimicked, as spurious as such identification might be.[7]

While I argue that the book/play/film's ability to examine heroin culture critically, is limited, I concede that this was a fantastic movie on many levels, and that many of the scenes are in fact extremely alienating in their execution. In many ways, Renton is not unlike Hippolytus in his unswerving quest for pleasure coupled with a destructive, anhedonic drive. As has been noted by popular culture critic Thomas Hibbs about Renton, "an ordinary life of conformity is caught up in all sorts of distracting worries about things like paying bills and making human relationships work. But a 'true and sincere drug habit' clarifies things. It gives simplicity and unity to one's life: the only worry is about scoring" (Hibbs 139). However, it is my belief and contention that what could have been a profound cultural exposé of Edinburgh heroin culture and disenfranchised youth is relegated to the profuse status of popular culture. For example, the only scene that truly captures the "numbing terror of drug

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[6] I concede that this failure in part may be due to casting choice that includes some of Britain's most popular television and film actors: Ewan McGregor, Robert Carlyle, and Ewan Bremnar (who is also featured in Kane's short film *Skin*), to name the principles.

[7] In the mid-nineties, a waif-like image became a fashion aspiration embodied, in Britain, by Calvin Klein model Kate Moss. Within this style models appeared strung out, hung over and with dark circles under glazed eyes. This look, which was thought by some in the fashion business to be attractive to young people, and which was typified by a "notorious set of pictures in 1997 advertising Calvin Klein clothes, has been dubbed ***heroin chic*** because the models look as if they are drug addicts. In fact, there are well-substantiated reports that heroin addiction is common among fashion photographers and models, so the look is not always simulated" (http://www.quinion.com/words/turnsofphrase/tp-her1.htm). Whether or not models were any more addicted than at any other time in fashion history is debatable.

life" (140), is when the child of one of the addicts (baby Dawn) "crawls aimlessly and unobtrusively from room to room. When the party is interrupted by the piercing screams of the mother as she discovers the child's dead and discoloured face, Renton observes with foreboding that this time it will not get better" (140). What should have been a long-lasting, terrifying image of a dead child is short lived, and is never mentioned again in the film (except, significantly during Renton's detoxification episode), and is only cursorily referred to in the book. Therefore, as Hibbs notes, "Renton is wrong: things do get better, or at least return to their typical state" (140).

Furthermore, the most alienating scenes in the book/film are arguably so outrageously impossible and unlikely that they border on the comic (albeit a very grotesque type of comedy, toilet humour if you will) or cartoonish. In one scene, Renton has taken a drug in the form of a suppository. He is also suffering an extreme urge to eliminate his bowels. He ends up in what is billed as the "filthiest toilets in Scotland," (139) and in the process of satisfying bodily urge, he forgets about the expensive suppository, which is now somewhere in the already overfilled and plugged toilet. His solution to the problem is captured, with cinematic special effect, by depicting Renton as diving "head first into the toilet […] and swimming through a sort of reservoir. Pill in hand, he emerges triumphantly from the toilet" (139). However, as I have already mentioned, the scene is far-fetched in its conception and filmed using a wide-angle lens and effects that suggest that what is taking place is within the realm of fantasy, not the sordid reality of drug addiction. Rather than reinforcing the grotty and desperate circumstances of drug culture, it renders junkies' addiction and its ensuing desperation as grotesquely comedic, bordering on the carnivalesque.

Hibbs begins his discussion about *Trainspotting* and other works of literature ranging from *Shakespeare* and *Milton* and various biblical passages, to *Pulp Fiction*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Seven* and finally *Seinfeld* with a lengthy meditation upon Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil. To summarize Arendt's argument as presented in Hibbs, and its relevance to the discussion: the conception of evil was called into question due to objections that held that the "penchant for myth necessarily falsifies the phenomenon of evil, bestowing upon it a grandeur and depth that it lacks" (Hibbs 101). As a result of her study of Adolph Eichmann's trial for his participation the Nazi's final solution, Arendt coined the phrase "'the banality of evil'" (102). She determined that "evil has 'neither depth nor any demonic dimension,'" and that conversely, "'only good has depth and can be radical'" (102). The conclusion of her theory of the banality of evil is that despite its apparent grandeur, it is fundamentally empty (103). Renton is banally evil: his evil is rooted in satire and in the will toward nihilism; his banality and susceptibility to the pressure of the world make him compelling and likable, despite his addiction and poor life choices. If his participation in drug culture is an attempt to transcend conventional society, he is incapable of doing so because he capitulates to conventional society's desires for consumption. In this way of reading his character, despite displays of his potential toward the mythic and therefore toward becoming a character with whom audiences would never sympathize, in the end he resists and does what most people would do: try to start again.

This inevitable emptiness, or banality, it seems, forms much of the fundamental basis of many contemporary sitcoms and films, including *Trainspotting*. While I concede that *Trainspotting* on many levels successfully mocks modern capitalist society, ultimately, it undoes its own social satire with Renton's final monologue in the film version:

> The truth is I'm bad but I'm going to change… I'm going straight and choosing life…I'm going to be just like you: the job, the family, the fucking big television, the washing machine, the car, good health, low cholesterol, dental insurance, mortgage […] looking ahead, the day you die. (Welsh)

As Hibbs suggests, "he already is one of us, or more pointedly, that we are already one with him" (142); the conclusion is that drug culture and straight culture are in fact more or less the same. The equation between straight and drug culture, the essential sameness of the two, regardless of how cutting the satire, reinforces the book/film's belief that drug culture is a game, rather than a serious and destructive social crisis. This may be true on an economic level of supply and demand, but the lasting impression is that the characters in *Trainspotting* are indeed playing a game, one that they can quit anytime they like. Renton's foray into nihilism that would closely resemble the complete abandonment of life that drug culture demands is tepid, and in the end he retreats by stealing the money and vowing to go "straight," and begin his pursuit of the accumulation of material goods mainstream society values and expects. This scene is also suggestive in that it arguably posits *Trainspotting* as the praxis of Dollimore's theory of the subversion/containment problematic,

> wherein repressive laws are seen not only to defeat us coercively […] but to inhabit us in ways which ensure our defeat prior to, in other ways than, direct force. Resistance from the margins seems doomed to replicate internally the strategies, structures, and even the values of the dominant (81).

Accordingly, the drug culture as portrayed by Welsh, despite its attempts to break free of the consumer demands, the capitalist necessity of life, and rigid social codes of behaviour, end up repeating those codes, behaviours and economic pursuits within their subculture. What is

more indicative of the capitalist maxim of supply and demand and the potential for economic gain than a drug deal, the cash from which will be used to procure all of the same items and signs of capitalist venture that people who have legally earned their money will also accumulate? It would seem safe to conclude that the values of the dominant culture are being repeated, despite attempts to avoid doing so, within this group that views itself as culturally subversive.

Perhaps this book/play/film is potentially the "dangerous mannerism" that David Edgar speaks about in reference to the Cool Britannia phenomenon. Welsh's failure to inspire the audience to evaluate the situation of heroin addiction in the U.K. critically, despite having many real opportunities to do so throughout the book and film, based as it is in real life situations, as a symptom of a larger issue of a disenfranchised generation would be viewed by Edgar, and others, as colossally irresponsible in the Brechtian tradition. It is observed that the Brechtian notion that the artist had a "moral…duty to encourage the audience to remedy social ills" (1904) is non-existent in Welsh's work and slickly subverted in *Trainspotting*, despite Brecht's enormous influence on playwriting in the twentieth century. This is not to say that all playwrights must follow Brechtian styles and social agendas, but rather to point out that Welsh has not followed this tradition and therefore can be distinguished from other playwrights who do.

Phaedra's Love deploys a resistant set of characters to enact a series of unpredictable events that pose calculated problems for the audience. The play's events and their moral dilemmas are the primary concern of the play. The audience must not identify with Phaedra or Hippolytus as persons: they are not constructed in such a conventional, psychological manner. Rather, these characters should be viewed as constructs--devices--enacting a play so

that the audience might consider the moral dilemmas posed by their actions. In this Brechtian manner they are both transparent and obscure, self-reflexive of the play's theatrics and self-knowledge of it as play.

In this manner, *Phaedra's Love* also demands the use of Brecht's method of eliciting a stylized acting of foregrounded theatricality. Brecht's use of a narrator in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for example, or the use of printed sign, and "stage machinery openly displayed" (Mack 1906), serve as a reminder for the audience that this is a play, an economic, cultural, language production. Brecht likewise filled his plays with "constant artificiality," making it difficult "for the audience to identify completely and unself-consciously with the characters on stage" (1906). Further evidence that Kane strives to achieve a Brechtian sense of "artificiality" can be detected in the comments of people who have worked with her. According to Nils Tabert, the man who translated Kane's work into German, "[s]he didn't want the audience to see blow jobs and mutilation; she regarded them as images" (Hattenstone 33). There is a general sense that she did not want her plays to be staged too realistically or taken too literally, that whatever was taking place on stage must be understood as complicated representation, as theatre. Taken from this perspective, scenes of graphic sex and mutilation would need to be staged with obvious stylized effect. Kane's aesthetic demands a particular style of acting, a style that foregrounds the issue, not the realism of the play.

Kane takes Brecht's ideas further than Brecht did in his time, within the available conventions of his theatre. Brecht's plays, for all of their aspirations toward objectivity and alienation, finally express a will to resolve, even if the resolution of the conflict may be temporary. For example, the epic concerns of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are resolved

neatly, albeit this is an exception in Brecht's oeuvre in general. Grusha is awarded custody of Michael and a divorce from her marriage of (in)convenience, so that the love story also resolves itself into a happy ending. Azdak's time as judge is remembered as "a brief golden age almost an age of justice…the children go to good mothers, that they prosper. The carts go to good drivers, that they are driven well. And the valley goes to the waterers, that it bring forth fruit" (Brecht 587). To a modern audience with postmodern sensibilities this type of utopian conclusion feels artificial, and undoes the critical stance that the rest of the play works so hard to achieve. Such resolution undermines the important struggles depicted in the body of the play. The effect of alienation closes in on itself as the audience may superficially breathe an unearned, collective sigh of relief that justice is served. In the end, Brecht cannot resist closure and in so doing fails to hold his audience at a far enough distance and thereby is unable to prevent them from coming too close to Grusha. By the end of the play they identify too much with her struggle. Experience, most recently postmodern experience, has taught its inhabitants that life is not like that.

At this point, the influence of Beckett, who in his theatre expresses doubt that there is closure to be found anywhere, is strongly detectable within the construction of *Phaedra's Love*, a play that resists such comforting resolution and succeeds in alienating its audience from the characters. In Beckett's plays and novels, the "sparest and starkest representation of the human condition in all it 'absurd' emptiness," present a world "haunted […] by an absence of meaning" (Mack 2138-39). While Brecht still offers his audience a way out, in Beckett a violation takes place. Theatrical forms that were once comfortably emotional were no longer presented as "images of action," but rather were "being employed for inaction, and its tradition of completions and endings was being flouted by an almost intolerable

irresolution" (Gilman 240). *Waiting for Godot* was described as "this play of our time, with its new tone, its simple and modest language, and its closed, circular plot from which no exit is possible" (238). The idea that conflict could not, and therefore should not be neatly resolved offers a way in which a playwright such as Kane could artistically depict a contemporary condition, with many tragic elements, without its dissolving into a pathetic heap of melodrama, or classical tragedy for that matter. In *Phaedra's Love* Kane shares Beckett's rejection of the "Cartesian image of Rational Man [...] Beckett is not so sure that logic allows us to know what we are looking at" (Mack 2139). Kane's characters in *Phaedra's Love* all suffer from such antagonism against logic; they grapple with emotions, find themselves in inexplicably cruel, and therefore illogical, situations from which escape through rational machination is nearly impossible. There is often no way out of the predicaments for Kane's characters. There is also no attempt on the playwright's part to resort to a *deus ex machina* to explain or rationalize the finality of the situation in *Phaedra's Love*.

Another point of similarity between Beckett and Kane is the use of language. Beckett wrote his drama and prose in French, because "it was easier to write 'without style'--without the native speaker's temptation to elegance and virtuoso display." He was able to achieve a "harsher, less nuanced focus" (Mack 2139) in his writing. Similarly, Kane's writing in *Phaedra's Love* resembles that ambition towards the creation of a minimalist dramatic language; it is a poetry reflective of the world that she attempts to depict. Like Beckett, Kane uses a "harsh" and direct style of speech. Her dialogue is sparse, colloquial, and economic. Kane uses sentence fragments, colloquial expression, swearing and street language to narrow the focus of the speech. At times the characters have difficulty expressing themselves and at

these moments meaning is found in the gaps and silences, rather than eloquent speeches incongruous with that character's ability.

Kane's play is ultimately not as existential as Beckett's work.[8] Beckett's belief in such a meaningless universe provides too empty a solution that departs too radically from lived experience. While Beckett's writing denies that "there is a knowable 'something to express'" (Mack 2141), *Phaedra's Love* is a desire to express something that must be known--violence and oppression on a grand scale. The point at which Kane thematically departs from Beckett emerges in Beckett's lack of interest

> in the present, in the changes that time effects, and in what we might call local, temporally or spatially differentiated existence. His imagination functions almost entirely outside history: what is, has been, and what has been, will be, so that writing for him is the struggle to find new means to express this proposition of stasis. (Gilman 252)

In contrast, *Phaedra's Love* is very much grounded in the present and the predicaments Kane presents do not occur in stasis. In a piece of theatre such as *Phaedra's Love*, I detect an affiliation with Brechtian calls for social change through art; however, Kane resists offering any suggestions as to how to sort out the mess of humanity that she presents in her art. Beckett's drama does "not add up to a reassembling of the phenomenal world [...] nor [does

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[8] Here I am using the word existential in a very generic manner to signify the general existential belief that "an individual has no essential nature, no self-identity other than that involved in the act of choosing [and that] the universe has no rational direction or scheme. It is meaningless and absurd" (Angeles 88).

it] constitute a commentary on the present state of personality or society" (253). Kane's drama is an artistic commentary and as such is an artistic re-assembling into dramatic structure of certain phenomena in the world.

Artistically, Kane seems to be positioned between a whole-hearted belief in the Beckettian tenet that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (253), and a belief that there may be altogether too many things to express, in particular that which seems inexpressible. The concepts that Kane seeks to express are of such pressing importance that the textual result is a body of work so overloaded with expression that it overwhelms. On the point that life is meaningless, she seems to stand in philosophical opposition to Beckett, for a play such as *Phaedra's Love* is layered with meaning, despite the fact that a lot of her character's actions are meaningless and the likelihood that the characters and consequently the audience might fail to comprehend the totality of the potential for meaning. At times, the play's events are so layered with meaning and reference to reality or situations that could be real that characters act in ways to compound the meaning: what is the purpose of Phaedra's suicide; why is Hippolytus able to approach the status of martyr?

At the end of this play there is anything but the feeling that life is meaningless; rather, there is the sensation that neither the meaning of events, nor people's actions and speech are always understood. Often "meaning" is beyond the ability to perceive. The actions of the characters constantly remind their audience or readers that they are watching a play, that the characters fulfil roles and that perhaps free will does not have as much to do with our actions as we would like to believe. Therefore Phaedra, as spurned woman, plays her part to its

extreme logical conclusion. Hippolytus, as hedonist, embraces the accusation of the utmost depravity, and plays the part to its logical extreme, which culminates in his death. The personal dimension becomes a public moral dilemma determining not only the fate of the individuals, but also the fate of the nation and, by symbolic extension, humanity.

Kane's second play is the progeny of such historically relevant and experimental theatre as produced by Brecht and Bond; however, she is also firmly rooted in the present constraints and demands of postmodern aesthetics. If in *Blasted* Kane began to realize the potential of postmodern aesthetics, in *Phaedra's Love* she taps into the postmodern phenomenon that Arthur Kroker and David Cook termed the panic culture in *The Postmodern Scene*.[9] According to Kroker and Cook, postmodernism is located at precisely the moment in which it happens that much of Kane's work was produced, the fin-de-millennium of the twentieth century, a time in which "the catastrophic, because fun, implosion of contemporary culture into a whole series of panic scenes," which serve "as a seismograph of the postmodern mood" (iii) occurs. I situate *Phaedra's Love* as a panic play that engages myth and problematizes sex, violence, identity and power because they are precariously balanced upon the "violent edge between ecstasy and decay" (9). Furthermore, I propose that as a panic play, *Phaedra's Love* inevitably engages violence, a noun that thinly conceals the verb "to violate," break rules by force, to ravish or desecrate, which is the central issue of the play--the alleged rape of Phaedra by Hippolytus. Therefore, I read this

[9] Kroker and Cook posit a theory of panic as the presiding mood of postmodernism in *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*. According to Kroker and Cook they wrote the book under the signs of "decay/ecstasy, hyper-pessimism/hyper-optimism, memory/amnesia"(i). The sense of panic is derived from the fascination with "catastrophe… the ecstatic implosion of postmodern culture into excess, waste, and disaccumulation" (i).

play as a participant in postmodern panic culture, and as an expression of the same postmodern trauma that is the result of an inherent state of violence, which results in the trauma of what it means to experience violation in the broadest terms possible.

If panic is the psychological mood of postmodern culture, then panic culture is "a floating reality, with the actual as a dream world, where we live on the edge of ecstasy and dread" (Kroker and Kroker *Encyclopedia*). The way in which this theory applies to *Phaedra's Love* is located in the play's engagement of desire and violence, sex and suicide. *Phaedra's Love* clearly exhibits the tendency toward such notions, as defined by Kroker and Cook, as "cancelled identities," the self as a site of catastrophe and the self as an empty sign. *Phaedra's Love* is a panic play that enacts the social and personal panic of fin-de-millennium Britain.

Kroker and Cook devise their notion of cancelled identities based on a painting by Alex Colville entitled "Woman in Bathtub." Of note is the averted gaze of the woman in the tub and the background figure who is featured without a head, or rather, his head would be situated somewhere just off the edge of the canvas (iv). I extrapolate this concept of identity as cancelled by position and figuration in space to *Phaedra's Love* and read Hippolytus as a cancelled identity on the grounds that his identity is contingent on Kroker and Cook's theory that reciprocity between humans is cancelled by the more immediate reality of radical isolation (vii). Earlier I proposed that the principle characters of *Phaedra's Love* were exemplary of Nietzsche's passive and suicidal nihilists; both are concepts that Kroker and Cook use to explain their notion of identity's propensity toward being cancelled, obliterated within the panic postmodern scene, a time in which "existence is [Nietzsche's] throw of the dice across the 'spider's web'" (8). Furthermore, Phaedra and Hippolytus are examples of

Kroker and Cook's conclusion that the postmodern self is ultimately a site of catastrophe (vi). I demonstrate the application of this theory to *Phaedra's Love* below.

Hippolytus is first viewed lolling amongst signs of detritus, the prevailing images of Kroker and Cook's (after Bataille) "excremental culture" (10): "*empty crisp and sweet packets, and a scattering of used socks and underwear*" (Kane 65), items that also suggest decomposition and decay, or at the very least neglect. [10] Contributing to this scene of an accumulation of waste is the presence of "*expensive electronic toys*" (65), impractical items that function here as signifiers of excess and waste much in the same way as the empty packets and dirty clothes. As the scene progresses, Hippolytus, who is also watching television, experiences a series of bodily urges, hunger, the need to sneeze, and sexual arousal, which in turn serve to further reinforce the scene as a precursor to the suicidal nihilism that Kroker and Cook predict will invade the postmodern scene.

In order to satisfy hunger, or rather the compulsion to consume, Hippolytus eats "*a hamburger*," while "*his eyes remain fixed on the flickering of a Hollywood film*" (65). His consumption of both hamburger and television is paradoxically both a sign of gluttony and

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[10] Bataille theorizes that there are essentially "two polarized human impulses: excretion and appropriation" ("Visions" 94). "Sexual activity, whether perverted or not; the behavior of one sex before the other; defecation; urination; death and the cult of cadavers (above all, insofar as it involves the stinking decomposition of bodies); the different taboos; ritual cannibalism; the sacrifice of animal-gods; omophagia; the laughter of exclusion; sobbing (which in general has death as its object); religious ecstasy; the identical attitude toward shit, gods, and cadavers; the terror that so often accompanies involuntary defecation; the custom of exchanging brilliant, lubricious, painted and jewelled women; gambling; heedless expenditure and certain fanciful uses of money, etc… together present a common character in that the object of the activity (excrement, shameful parts, cadavers, etc…) is found each time treated as a foreign body… in other words, it can just as well be expelled following a brutal rupture as reabsorbed through the desire to put one's body and mind in a more or less violent state of expulsion… The notion of the (heterogeneous) foreign body permits one to note the elementary subjective identity between types of excrement (sperm, menstrual blood, urine, fecal matter) and everything that can be seen as sacred, divine, or marvellous" (94).

wasting; the things being consumed are empty of substance and meaning, or any signification beyond themselves. In this scenario, food and television are both empty signs and Hippolytus, in his consumptive state, displays his propensity toward being an "empty sign" himself as he more accurately resembles an engorged parasite. [11]

Momentarily, Hippolytus experiences the urge to sneeze, to expel waste from his body; what more is a sneeze than the simple bodily urge to expel something foreign and irritating from one's upper respiratory passages? Hippolytus answers that question himself in the moments that follow his urge to sneeze. He apparently thwarts this urge by blowing his nose into a sock that he finds on the floor. Or, should I say, he delays the potential satisfaction he might gain from sneezing. Further investigation reveals that sneezing is not always simply a bodily reaction against foreign particle invasion of the respiratory tract. [12] Sneezing possesses a certain ejaculatory quality, and the relief that follows is popularly compared to the feeling of relief following orgasm. Read in combination with the bodily functions detailed above, it would appear that Hippolytus is being constructed not as a psychological construct, but as bodily function.

The desire to sneeze, which is denied by the blowing of the nose, leads to additional bodily urges. Meanwhile, Hippolytus has barely taken his eyes from the television; as the television program becomes more violent, Hippolytus experiences sexual arousal. He "*picks*

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[11] Here, I am intentionally invoking a connection between Hippolytus's consumer driven consumptive illness and Tuberculosis because the word consumption implies the consummation of the body; here Hippolytus is literally consuming, and simultaneously being emptied of life signs, very much as a consumptive is believed to be deprived of life by the disease.

[12] Apparently one can even have a sneezing fetish. See http://pub159.ezboard.com/bsneezingfetishforum for more information.

up another sock, examines it and discards it. He picks up another, examines it and decides it's fine. He puts his penis into the sock and masturbates until he comes without a flicker of pleasure. He takes off the sock and throws it on the floor" (65). Here, sexual urge is both bodily function and response to violent stimulus. As parasite, Hippolytus's actions appear gluttonous; he consumes junk food, television and sexual arousal. However, I argue that this apparent consumption is anorexic in its manifestation since Hippolytus's behaviours do not appear to be born of desire, but of the "liquidation of desire" (Kroker 13). He does not enjoy any of the activities in which he partakes. He is devoid of any emotion, pleasure or even disgust for that matter. His body has "succumbed to the parasites of postmodern culture" (13) or, worse, he is a parasite.

Kroker and Cook remind us that Lyotard pronounced that the postmodern condition can be identified by the death of the "grand récits," a period "marked by a refusal of the phallocentric and representational logic of Enlightenment" (15).[13] Kroker and Cook modify this formulation of the postmodern scene: "an historical moment of implosion, cancellation and reversal" (15) of these grand narratives. Within this paradigm, Hippolytus must be read as a cancelled identity, even when it is tempting to read him as an over-coded text that signifies far too much. Part of Phaedra's frustration is the result of her attempts to "read" Hippolytus as if he were a text, inscribed with the signs and experiences of life, or a type of

[13] Lyotard says: "the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced, at least not on their former scale […] this breaking up of the Grand Narratives… leads to what some authors to analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass or individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening " (14-5). Later he reiterates: "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37).

narrative of man, instead of displaying his status as cancelled identity and parasite. Phaedra mistakes Hippolytus's being-in-the-world for an illness.

In the second scene, Phaedra is in the process of consulting the royal physician in order to determine the cause of her stepson's "illness." Her questions, and the doctor's responses result in continued frustration for Phaedra; the doctor cannot tell her anything she does not already know:

Doctor.	He's depressed.
Phaedra.	I know.
Doctor.	He should change his diet. He can't live on hamburgers and peanut butter.
Phaedra.	I know.
Doctor.	And wash his clothes occasionally. He smells.
Phaedra.	I know. I told you this. (Kane 65)

The verbal exchange is clipped and choppy. It is devoid of real content; it is non-conversational. As text, Hippolytus is a complicated read for Phaedra, and a simple one for the Doctor. She does not understand why he behaves the way he does and as a consequence she enlists the Doctor's opinion in order to medicalize, to turn his behaviour into symptom. Phaedra's impatience with the Doctor's inability to medicalize and therefore name Hippolytus's symptoms in the hopes of finding a cure finally result in her frustration: "I think my son is ill. I think you should help. I think after six years training and thirty years experience the royal doctor should come up with something better than he has to lose weight […] I didn't ask you to speculate. I asked for a diagnosis. Treatment" (67-8). The Doctor finally yields to her pressure and pronounces his diagnosis and prognosis: "There's nothing

wrong with him medically [...] He's just very unpleasant. And therefore incurable" (68). The pronouncement cancels his identity. As incurable patient, Hippolytus is relegated to the trash heap; he is confirmed as detritus, excremental subject in a throw away society.

Arguably, Hippolytus is complicit in this cancellation of his identity by refusing to take part in the family or in society in a meaningful way; he is by no means a victim of a cruel or unjust order. However, Hippolytus is cruel, and his bedroom quickly becomes a type micro theatre of cruelty in Scene Four. [14] Certainly it contains much of the "living force" that Artaud believes defines poetry, that "the image of crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than that same crime when actually committed" (85). The challenge of reading Kane's bedroom scene becomes an issue of how to read the actions that ensue: does Hippolytus intentionally humiliate and violate Phaedra?

Hippolytus's parasitic existence also exhibits signs of Kroker and Cook's "novel psychological condition--the schizoid state of postmodern selves who are (simultaneously) predators and parasites" (vii). His parasitic condition is clearly evident in his consumptive activities. His predation is less immediately apparent until the first interaction between Phaedra and himself. Hippolytus suffers, terminally, from anhedonia; he is incapable of experiencing pleasure in things that are normally pleasurable; rather, he finds pleasure in things that are normally considered unpleasant,

namely his own demise, but also the demise of those who are close to him, specifically Phaedra. Accordingly, when Phaedra attempts to converse with him by delivering his

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[14] By theatre of cruelty I am referring both to Kroker and Cook's minimal reference to its presence in art (13), which I believe to be a reference to Artaud, and Artaud's own manifesto of cruelty. I will explain and the relevance of his theory at a later point in this chapter.

birthday presents to his room, he rudely ignores her presence, and her actions, which include a half-hearted attempt to tidy the room of its empty packages and dirty laundry, until he finally assaults her by asking: "When was the last time you had a fuck?" (74). While it is revealed in the previous scene that Phaedra intends to seduce her stepson as a way of relieving her obsession with him, and arguably she has come to his room with this intention, and therefore her actions might be understood as a predatory action on her part, it is Hippolytus who preys upon Phaedra.

His predation alternates between aggression and passivity, verbal assault and self-pity. He cancels Phaedra's attempts to make pleasant conversation by rudely ignoring her questions and suggesting that her husband, Theseus, has not been "keeping it dry either" (74), a comment that indicates that he knows that Phaedra has come to his room with the intention of seducing him. Hippolytus's suggestion that Theseus is probably being unfaithful to her, in a manner of speaking, gives Phaedra permission to be unfaithful as well, and might be taken by Phaedra as an invitation from Hippolytus. He switches from lurid rudeness to his own self-pity when he reveals that he bought himself his own birthday present because it was the "only way of making sure [he] get[s] what [he] want[s]. Wrapped it up and everything" (75). The rapid shift from speculating on his father's promiscuity to self-pity can be read as a manipulative tactic on his part. His side of the conversation is intentionally confusing and illogical; it invalidates Phaedra's attempts at sincere participation. By way of deterring, or painfully prolonging, Phaedra's advances he bluntly tells her that he "hate[s] people" (75). When Phaedra attempts to console him by responding that "they don't hate you" (75), he turns the conversation back to sex: "You're right. Women find me much more attractive since I've become fat. They think I must have a secret [...] I'm fat. I'm disgusting. I'm

miserable. But I get lots of sex" (75-6). Additionally, he attempts to turn her off (or perversely turn her on) by trying to simultaneously make her jealous of his previous lovers and convince her of how disgusting he is. Phaedra tries to ask him when the last time was that he had sex, and his response is: "Don't know. Last time I went out [...] No. Someone came round. Fat bird. Smelt funny. And I fucked a man in the garden [...] Looked like one but you can never be sure" (76). His passive predation also includes actively and repeatedly prodding Phaedra with the question "hate me now?" (76, 78, 85).

Parasitically lapping up the effect of his power over Phaedra, he simultaneously preys upon Phaedra's vulnerability as a woman who perceives herself as being abandoned by her husband. She tells Strophe, her stepdaughter, in Scene Three that Theseus "won't come back, [because he is] too busy being useless" (71). Hippolytus toys with her emotions by telling her that he thinks about having sex with everyone, and then by saying to her: "If we fuck we'll never talk again" (80). Knowing that this will only encourage Phaedra to prove him wrong, he tells her to "Go away," that "It's obviously the only thing to do" (80), knowing that she will interpret that as an invitation to "give him his birthday present," which happens to be fellatio. Instead of leaving, she succumbs to his predatory actions and "*performs oral sex on him,*" while he "*watches the screen throughout and eats his sweets*" (81). As parasite, he resumes his consumptive activities, unemotionally, and passively, until "*As he is about to come he makes a sound. Phaedra begins to move her head away--he holds it down and comes in her mouth without taking his eyes off the television. He releases her head*" (81). Schizophrenically, Hippolytus flickers between parasite and predator until, knowing that he can overwhelm Phaedra, he makes a full-fledged leap into the role of sexual terrorist with

actions that confirm my contention that Hippolytus is the director of his own theatre of cruelty.[15]

Hippolytus reduces Phaedra to tears, insults her lack of sexual talent, tries to convince her that she did not enjoy herself, that the encounter was meaningless, and that all such encounters are, in fact, meaningless: "Fuck someone else imagine its me. Shouldn't be difficult, everyone looks the same when they come" (82). Then as abruptly as the cruelty began, Hippolytus suddenly, albeit it is a momentary glitch in his agenda, becomes the victim of Phaedra's insensitivity when she reminds Hippolytus about someone, Lena, who had "burned" him. He recovers his position by physically grabbing Phaedra by the throat: "Don't ever mention her again. Don't say her name to me, don't refer to her, don't even think about her, understand? Understand [...] No one burns me, no one fucking touches me. So don't try" (83). She has obviously irritated one of his few remaining nerve endings that confirm that he is still in fact human, despite his parasitic, predatory existence.

Phaedra makes a weak attempt to return Hippolytus's insults about her sexual performance; however, as predator he is untouchable in this game. Rather, he further humiliates her by countering her weak insult, "you're just like your father," with "that's what your daughter said" (83). Near the end of the scene, Phaedra finds it within her diminished state to tell Hippolytus that he is a "heartless bastard"; however, it seems that that is the role that Hippolytus has intended to play all along. Hippolytus proverbially rubs salt in Phaedra's fresh wounds by suggesting that she "See a doctor," because he's "got

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[15] The word schizophrenic has been used and abused in literary criticism. Here, I am using the word not in reference to clinical psychosis, but rather to postmodern appropriation of the word to signify what the OED defines as the maintenance of two apparently conflicting attitudes, opinions, etc.

gonorrhoea" (85). The reference to sexual disease returns my analysis of this scene to Kroker and Cook's theory of excremental culture, and my theory that what Kane is describing is in fact a culture of excrement.

Although gonorrhoea is not specifically mentioned by Kroker and Cook in their catalogue of signifiers of the panic scene (it is in fact a rather old fashioned sexual disease), I read it as also holding the ability, like AIDS and Herpes, to trace "the [poststructuralist] inscription[s] of power on the text of the flesh" (13). [16] It would seem, according to Kroker and Cook, that sex without disease in the postmodern excremental scene is nearly impossible, or at best not postmodern. In excremental culture sexual diseases signal a "real loss of social solidarity, and nominate[s] sex without secretions--sex without a body--as a substitute for the normal passage of bodily fluids" (13). In other words the fear of sexual disease has inspired the removal of the body from sex as evidenced in the growing trend toward cybersex. However, in *Phaedra's Love*, sex still involves an exchange of bodily fluids, and therefore includes the risk of contracting disease, as admitted by Hippolytus. Furthermore, the scene I have just described indeed depicts a loss of social solidarity, if not social order: Stepmother performs fellatio for stepson, who has had sex with stepsister, who in turn has had sex with stepfather indicates a radical break from conventional socio-sexual taboo. It does not matter whether or not Hippolytus actually has a sexual disease; the threat and the implications are real, and effective for concluding his theatre of cruelty.

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[16] It is commonly believed that people who contract gonorrhoea will be more likely to contract HIV and AIDS, which relates gonorrhoea indirectly to Kroker and Cook's postulation about disease and the postmodern excremental scene. See http://www.4woman.gov/faq/stdgonor.htm?src=ng or http://www.willyworries.com/pages/gonorrhoea.htm for more graphic views.

The conception of a theatre of cruelty is not only relevant to Kane's work, and its relationship to the audience, as a whole, but also within this play; Hippolytus himself masterminds a theatre of cruelty, a play of cruelty within the play of cruelty, between himself and Phaedra. Accordingly, Hippolytus's theatre includes Artaud's conception that the "Theatre of Cruelty will choose subjects and themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch" (Artaud 122). This notion is evident in Kane's play in the topical reference to the current epoch, in which the sexual lives of Britain's monarchical family are indeed topical.[17] In addition, AIDS and sexually transmitted disease were and continue to be in the forefront of everyone's reality and imagination. Artaud also emphasizes the necessity of bringing "into fashion the great preoccupations and great essential passions which the modern theatre has hidden under the patina of the pseudocivilized man" (122-23). Kane orchestrates Hippolytus's own orchestration of a modern rendition of the classical revenge tactic: the false accusation of rape. This is the point at which Kane's play most radically diverges from Euripides's and Seneca's version of the Hippolytus/Phaedra myth. While both the classical versions of the Hippolytus character are in fact wholly innocent of the charge due to the fact that there has been no sexual contact between the two, in *Phaedra's*

[17] It is important to remember that the Princess Diana does not die until 1997, and that in the years leading up to her death between approximately 1993-1997, which include the year that this play was produced, public interest had been focussed on the private lives and the suspected breakdown of the heir apparent's marriage. It was rumoured that while Prince Charles had resumed an affair with an old flame, Camilla Parker Bowles, and Diana was rumoured to have been having an affair with her (married) riding instructor, a soccer player and playboy Dodi El-Fayad, son of multi-millionaire owner of Harrod's. In 1992, Charles publicly disclosed that he had been unfaithful to his wife Diana, only after it had become apparent that things "had become irretrievably broken down" (this quote is based on my memory of having seen the BBC broadcast while I was living in London, in 1992-93. I believe that I recall more or less verbatim the words he used to describe the breakdown of his marriage.)

Love Hippolytus is wholly complicit. Hippolytus enacts verbal, and emotional and physical violence upon Phaedra. Within violence lays the nascent act of violation: when Kane's Phaedra declares that Hippolytus has violated her, she is not actually fabricating the charge; likewise, Hippolytus refuses to deny the charge. During the scene between Strophe and Hippolytus in which it is revealed that Phaedra has made the charge and has also committed suicide, Hippolytus asks Strophe: "Did I force you?" She replies by saying: "There aren't words for what you did to me." Hippolytus then says: "Then perhaps rape is the best she can do" (87).

The implication is that while privately Hippolytus denies having raped Phaedra (91), he knows that he has done something akin to rape. After turning himself in, he says to the Priest that he admits: "The rape. I did it" (92), however he refuses to "confess." [18] The critical difference between the verbs "to admit" and "to confess" can be found in the inherent instability of language for the two words are frequently used synonymously. By refusing to confess, but willing to admit, Hippolytus is forcing a point of difference: while agreeing to admit to the rape, Hippolytus will not confess the sin, and thereby admit the existence of God. The point upon which Hippolytus argues is also the difference between action and intent. He may not have intended to drive Phaedra to suicide as a result of his performance in his theatre of cruelty. To admit something is to declare that it is possible. To confess would be to admit that he knowingly and intentionally raped her. Perhaps he thought he was helping

[18] Here, one might read the Priest as an agent of Jonathan Dollimore's perverse dynamic. Within this paradigm, the Priest would be acting as an agent of the law, a force which seeks to reincorporate Hippolytus on the principle that "subversion and transgression are not merely defeated by law, but actually produced by law in a complex process of (re)-legitimation" (81). If the Priest can secure a confession, then the royal family will remain intact and therefore the law of the land, the status quo, will too.

by creating a "spectacle unafraid of going as far as necessary in the exploration of our nervous sensibility" (87); perhaps this exploration was more for the benefit of Hippolytus. Or, Hippolytus is revealing himself as a pure nihilist in the throes of decadence; he believes, as Nietzsche suggests, "there is no improvement (against repentance)" (25). Nevertheless, realizing his role in her death, he admits responsibility, but he will not ask for forgiveness for the sake of political decorum, as he aptly points out to the Priest: "I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you'll confess. Then you're forgiven. And then you start all over again. How dare you mock a God so powerful? Unless you don't really believe" (Kane 96). The result of Hippolytus's actions and choices is not one suicide, but two: both Phaedra and Hippolytus choose of death in lieu of making a confession.

If the surface of the play suggests participation in the panic culture of postmodernism, then it would also be valuable to excavate other theories of the postmodern for further evidence of the play's membership in that aesthetic, and for support of my theory that Kane's plays suggest a theory of the postmodern that posits it as a condition that is defined by violence, nihilism and trauma. In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster discusses traumatic realism and its relation both to Lacan's notion of the Real and to Kristeva's theories of the abject. In the section entitled "Traumatic Illusionism," Foster postulates that abject art "rejects illusionism, indeed any sublimation of the object gaze, in an attempt to evoke the real [...] is drawn to the broken boundaries of the violated body"(152). [19] I invoke the abject first and foremost because of the primary correspondence between the abject and maternity, a

[19] Foster's book is mainly focussed on the visual arts; however I found his discussion regarding abject art particularly useful for a discussion of *Phaedra's Love*.

theme that is central, as evidenced by the relationship between Phaedra and stepson, in *Phaedra's Love*. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva is concerned with the abjection of the mother, and simultaneously with crisis in identity. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be (Kristeva 10). For Kristeva, the mother is neither subject nor object; the mother is made abject in order to, and during the process of, separation (54). It is within this crisis of separation that abjection occurs as separation of mother from child and child from mother. However, in *Phaedra's Love* Hippolytus and Phaedra are not related through blood, and do not bear the expected abject mother/child relationship. He is not the subject of primal separation from her. I contend that abjection in this play is rooted in Hippolytus's loss of his biological mother, and in Phaedra's perverse desire for the son who is not her son. The boundary between mother and son is corrupt, or perverse. An example of this type of abjection is present and can be located within the dialogue between Phaedra and the Doctor.

In Scene Two, during the disjointed conversation between Phaedra and the Doctor, the Doctor interrogates Phaedra as to whether Hippolytus has sex with her. He must ask her twice because she does not appear to "get" what he is asking the first time. Her response is neither "yes," nor "no," but comes in the form of a nonsequitor: "I'm his stepmother. We are Royal" (66). While the Doctor does not "mean to be rude," he probes Phaedra a second time, this time asking her if she is "in love with him" (67). Again her answer has nothing to do the question; she replies by way of reminding him that she is "married to his father" (67). The third statement of interest occurs when the Doctor suggests that "perhaps he's missing his real mother;" but that "that's not a reflection on [her] abilities as a substitute, but there is,

after all, no blood between [them]. [He's] merely speculating [...] Although he's a little old to be feeling orphaned" (68). The Doctor's final advice to Phaedra is to "get over him" (68).

In this scene, abjection surfaces marginally through Phaedra's "failure to recognize [her] kin" (Kristeva 5). Along the same vein as Phaedra's failure, Hippolytus has "swallowed up his parents too soon [...] and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him--all gifts, all objects" (5-6), something Hippolytus does quite literally in the bedroom/birthday scene. To quote Kristeva further: "He has, he could have, a sense of the abject. Even before things for him *are*--hence before they are signifiable--he drives them out, dominated by drive as he is, and constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject. A sacred configuration. Fear cements his compound, conjoined to another world, thrown up, driven out, forfeited" (6). Indeed, Hippolytus has been forfeited of his role in the family, in the rule of the Kingdom. As Phaedra informs the Doctor, it is herself and her daughter who administer the country while Theseus is away. Hippolytus has, either by choice or by force, retreated to his den, a womb-like entombment in which he has regressed to an infantile, grasping thing driven by a sick pleasure as much as he is driven by necessity.

Part of Phaedra's agenda of soliciting a cure from the doctor is an attempt to expel this thing that she wishes she "could cut open [her] chest [in order to] tear it out to stop the pain" (69). In other words, she wishes to expel her desire, which can never be fulfilled. As Phaedra tells Strophe in Scene Three, she wants to "climb inside him and work him out" (71). Phaedra's desire to work him out might simply mean that she wants to figure him out, solve the mystery that is Hippolytus. However, within the paradigm of abjection, Phaedra's distinction between inside and outside, of wanting to "climb in" and "work him out" suggestively appeal to images of borders that have been threatened or violated; in this

scenario, he is the abject presence that she must get rid of "*in order to be an I*" (Foster 153), a subject in her own right. Foster suggests that the "abject touches on the fragility of our boundaries, the fragility of spatial distinction between our insides and outsides as well as of the temporal passage between the maternal body" (153). Hippolytus threatens Phaedra's physical stability. She thinks that she will "crack open" (71), if she does not have him. However, despite Phaedra's behaviours that suggest that Hippolytus is an abject presence that threatens her existence unless she can neutralize his abjection, Hippolytus is arguably not an abject subject.

Kristeva explains that it is "what disturbs identity, system, order" that causes abjection. "The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior .... Any crime because it draws attention to the fragments of the law, is abject" (4); but Hippolytus is none of these things. This is why he will not confess. He is not a common criminal. Instead, he is more closely akin to the melancholic, those that in Kristeva's opinion "[deny] morality," [that] "there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law--rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime" (4). This is Hippolytus at his best: amoral, disrespectful of authority, law and religion--the grand récits. And in the end, Hippolytus's choice to not play by the rules, to deny his ability to save himself through confession is a type of suicide. He chooses death over capitulation. My assessment of Hippolytus as a non-abject character is based upon Scene Six, which takes place between Hippolytus and the Priest.

In *Phaedra's Love*, the Priest functions as a symbol of corrupt authority of the worst kind. His authority presides within his supposed privileged relationship to God, and his

ability to intercede between God and humanity. However, in this scene, Hippolytus exposes the Priest as a hypocrite, while simultaneously positing himself as a grand amoralist in whom, according to the Priest, "there is a kind of purity" (Kane 97). First, Hippolytus positions the Priest outside of paternity by informing the Priest, after he addresses Hippolytus as "son," that the Priest is not Hippolytus's "father" (92). This action is significant because by removing the lie of paternity, Hippolytus also exposes the artifice and fragility of religious order and power. Hippolytus exposes that power which is based on a presumed relationship between Priest and divinity; indeed, the Priest refers to himself in the first person plural, "us," thereby identifying himself not simply as Priest, but as Priest and God. However, Hippolytus likens the Priest's relationship with God, not to one of equality, or to a relationship between Message and Messenger, but to that of lovers: "You have the worst lover of all. Not only does he think he's perfect, he is" (93). In denying the existence of God, Hippolytus is also denying abjection: One can only be abject if one recognizes that there are boundaries--rules that can be disturbed, for example, the boundary between sacred and profane; Hippolytus refuses to recognize the existence of this boundary.

Furthermore, he possess the ability to abject the Priest. The Priest's objective in visiting Hippolytus in jail is to procure a confession of the crime. The Priest anticipates a type of performance in which through Hippolytus's confession, the monarchy and therefore the country will be saved. Hippolytus however, envisions another type of performance: as suicidal nihilist Hippolytus craves the end. He claims that instead of experiencing remorse, he experiences "joy"(92), and in the moment before his death, he says: "If there could have been more moments like this" (103). In the aftermath of what has just occurred on stage he

can only be referring to the complete finality of the situation, and of course his own impending and brutal death.

During this prison scene, Hippolytus draws out the Priest's own abjection by recognizing the Priest's precarious status as subject, which is contingent on his ability to successfully repress the primal, and fear jouissance (Kristeva 9). But, it is only the Priest's eventual jouissance that is played out in the act of fellatio that confirms his status as abject. According to Kristeva's paradigm this act renders him a fragile, "pseudo-object," the "object of primal repression" (12). Hippolytus baits the Priest by denying the existence of God, refusing to confess and then finally by accusing the Priest of not believing in God either. When Hippolytus asks him, "Do you believe in God," the Priest does not answer, but rather just, "*Looks at him*" (96). He accuses the Priest of hypocrisy and at the same time confers his assurance in the borders between himself and others, between truth and the lie: "I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you'll confess. Then you're forgiven. And then you start all over again. How dare you mock a God so powerful? Unless you don't really believe" (96). Furthermore, Hippolytus recognizes the border between right and wrong: I killed a woman and I will be punished for it by hypocrites who I shall take down with me. May we burn in hell" (96-7). It is a border that the Priest, as abject, is asking him to deny through confession. Finally, he informs the Priest that "he has no intention of behaving like an animal" (97). He will "leave that to [him]" (97). In doing so, Hippolytus is preying upon the Priest's inherent state of abjection; the Priest, under Hippolytus's more stable power is in danger of straying "on the territories of the animal" (Kristeva 12). And as Kristeva notes, attempts to break away (from maternity) are accompanied by the "constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (13). As pseudo-father,

the Priest succumbs to his abject state of primitivity, in which he proceeds to "*perform oral sex on Hippolytus*" (Kane 97). Hippolytus refuses to play the Priest's game, refuses to "cover [his] arse" (96); he leaves the false and empty confession and repentance to the Priest, who will surely have to confess his sin, and repent after his interlude with Hippolytus. As an abject, the Priest is unable to maintain the borders between his state of "fatherhood" and Hippolytus's position as "son"; nor can he maintain the border between sacred and profane and so he profanes himself in this scene; but it does not matter to the abject because, as Hippolytus says, he can "Go. Confess. Before [he] burn[s]" (97). In this moment Hippolytus is sublime; the Priest is abject.

Hippolytus might also be understood as Dollimore's concept of a sexual dissident. In *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault,* Dollimore describes two issues of note: "the complex often violent, sometimes murderous dialectic between dominant and subordinate cultures, groups, and identities," and

> conceptions of self, desire, and transgression which figure in the language, ideologies, and cultures of domination, and in the diverse kinds of resistance to it. One kind of resistance, operating in terms of gender, repeatedly unsettles the very opposition between the dominant and the subordinate,

which Dollimore terms "sexual dissidence" (21). Dollimore's study of dissidence is partly based on Foucault's observation that "'what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity'" (Dollimore 23). Furthermore, Dollimore's study theorizes, based on foundations laid by Frantz Fanon, Mary Douglas and others, that there is a "realization that dissidence may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically), but in a sense actually

produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges" (26-7). Dollimore terms this the "subversion/containment debate," therefore positing that perversion, and its central importance as the expression of sexual dissidence, is a "culturally central phenomenon" (27).

Kane constructed Hippolytus as a sex addict, a chronic masturbator and bi-sexual; arguably, his sexual choices are transgressive in relation to the norms of the culture in which he is situated, a culture that despite its displays of sexual liberation, still values and violently imposes the norms of heterosexual matrimony. Kane also chose to present Hippolytus's transgression differently from earlier versions of his character, which were also arguably transgressive figures in their manifestations. It is in fact the transgression of the Hippolytus-figures that is the impetus for the Phaedra-figures' attempts to reinscribe his sexuality within the expected norm. As chaste devotee of Diana, Euripides' and Seneca's version of Hippolytus transgresses the compulsive heterosexual and heterosocial expectations of his society; however, he adequately participates in the expected homosocial culture of hunting. Similarly, Kane's Hippolytus transgresses by refusing to act within a fixed heterosexual and monogamous sexuality.

The notion of a fixed or essential identity has generally proven problematic in theories of the postmodern and specifically for studies of containment and transgression. Any discussion that attempts to apply the notion of transgression to Hippolytus's behaviour is first of all in need of a discussion regarding concepts of the self. As Dollimore notes, "humanist transgression in the name of an essential self has proved wanting [for] with the postmodern repudiation of the very existence of the essential self, there are those who have become sceptical about the possibilities of effective transgression, and pessimistic about the

possibilities of radical change" (81). However, I add to the argument the idea that not all theories of the postmodern repudiate the notion of an essential self. In fact, there seems to be an inherent contraction amongst theories of the postmodern that either announces the death of unified self, or from the more conservative camp, celebrates a radical individualism that threatens to become a culture of narcissism that has lost all sense of social values.[20] Nevertheless, the problem remains, that regardless of the prevalent understanding of the self, attempts to transgress are understood as more or less "doomed to replicate internally the strategies, structures, and even the values of the dominant" (81).

Accordingly, Hippolytus's refusal to participate in normative sexual behaviours incurs the wrath of state and church. Within the regulations for prescribed sexual activity Hippolytus must confess that he has committed a crime; the confession in turn will serve as the means by which he can be reinscribed in the society. His capitulation to Law and Religion, despite that act's necessitating a false confession, would save his life, and the reputation of the royal family. The logical conclusion that can be arrived at is that rape is a normal behaviour within the dominant culture, and therefore a forgivable transgression; in fact the concept of rape allows for violent sexual transgression and redress. However, whatever it is that Hippolytus did (which includes humiliation, manipulation, cruelty, but not technically rape) is outside of the understood limitations and allowable transgressions. By normalizing Hippolytus's behaviour, the threat that he potentially poses to the accepted

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[20] As Lasch notes in *The Culture of Narcisissm*, narcissism had been drained of its clinical meaning by Erich Fromm; he also "'expand[ed] it to cover all forms of 'vanity,' 'self-admiration,' 'self-satisfaction,' and 'self-glorification' in individuals and all forms of parochialism, ethnic or racial prejudice, and 'fanaticism' in groups" (71). For arguments for this notion of narcissism as a metaphor of our time see also Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, 71-103.

heterosexual, monogamous and heterosocial order can be averted. His refusal to allow himself to be reinscribed within this order necessitates his extermination.

According to Dollimore's theory, it is Hippolytus's perversion that draws attention to the fragility of the system, the "instabilities and contradictions within the dominant structures which exist by virtue of exactly what those structures simultaneously contain and exclude" (33). He poses a threat because he enacts the very things that the state violently represses, and which are fully evident in the Priest's complete and automatic readiness and willingness to partake in "deviant" priestly (and Fatherly) behaviour by performing fellatio upon Hippolytus. As the Priest reminds Hippolytus, he is a "guardian of [the country's] morals" (Kane 94). If he admits a legitimate transgression, then social order can be restored. If he will not, then he must die for his "sins." His refusal to capitulate makes his transgression successful; however it also ensures that his perverse existence will be violently removed.

Phaedra, on the other hand, is abject. As Kristeva says, "The traitor, the liar […] is abject […] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it […] a friend who stabs you" (4). Accordingly, Phaedra can be read as a traitor. She entered Hippolytus's bedroom with the sole intention of seducing him. Things do not go as she had planned, so she lies about the rape. She displays an immorality that is both scheming and sinister, to herself and to Hippolytus. During Scene Three, between Phaedra and her daughter Strophe, Phaedra displays her emotional instability, which also displays her sinister potential when she says to Strophe: "go away fuck off don't touch me don't talk to me stay with me" (69). When Strophe indicates that she understands that her mother's moodiness is linked to Hippolytus, Phaedra "*Screams,*" and then "*Laughs hysterically,*" only to deny her obsession: "What are

you talking about?" (69). Finally, she claims that they have a special relationship, "He talks to me, you know, we, we know each other very well, he tells me things, we're very close" (69), yet in the end, as Kristeva argues the abject will do, she "stabs him"; she falsely accuses him, and in the midst of her own lie, and perhaps even as a result of the realization of her own abject behaviour, she kills herself.

However, before this supreme act of suicide Phaedra becomes a site within which there is a detectable breakdown of Kristeva's "symbolic order," a breakdown in language evidenced by her increasing inability to express herself, which perhaps also contributes to the seeming necessity of suicide. During the bedroom scene, Phaedra displays halting speech, which finally, near the end of the scene, results in her repeated attempts to speak but in which "*She opens her mouth to speak. She can't*"; she "*opens her mouth but is momentarily lost for words*"; she "*opens her mouth. No sounds comes out*"; and finally, "she "*tries to speak. A long silence. Eventually* [she] *leaves*"(84-5). Arguably, Phaedra's abjection, as evidenced by the crisis in language, is also a symptom of the play's postmodernity, the "schizophrenic breakdown in language" (Foster 165). Viewed in this manner, Phaedra has no choice but to enact a suicide. Her passive nihilism, weary, weak, worn out, her previous desire liquidated by the predatory nihilism of her stepson, she disintegrates. Her nihilism exhibits signs of Nietzsche's self-narcotization, as noted by Foster, in which her blind enthusiasm for a single human being (20) results in the overriding weakness of the will. She chooses one of Nietzsche's signposts of modernism: "'the predominance of suffering over pleasure'" (23). Her physiological decadence and her unrequited desire lead to the nihilistic expression played out in her erasure, or to return to Kroker's term, her own "cancellation" of her identity.

But if the breakdown in language is considered schizophrenic, then how must the breakdown of social order be understood in the final scene of the play? Foster raises the question as to why in postmodernism there is such a "fascination with trauma" (166), and certainly the final scene of *Phaedra's Love* is riddled with traumatic and traumatizing events. Foster postulates that, "for many in contemporary culture truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body. To be sure, this body is the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth [...] there is a tendency [in contemporary culture] to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma" (166). In its simplest conception, trauma, as defined by Freud, refers to a person's lack of preparedness for an event that happens forcefully and unexpectedly (Freud 305). It is commonly known that, according to both Freudian and Jungian theorists, trauma incurs destructive effects on the development of the ego; however, what is less commonly acknowledged is that "autonomous traumatic fantasy is equally disruptive" (Skea). Furthermore, as Skea explains

> it seems that a decrease in the possibility of outer-inflicted trauma, while apparently the trend of the development of human civilisation, sets up intrapsychic tension and irrational fantasies of future trauma, which traumatises the individual from within, causing neurotic conflict, or else gets projected and acted out in the outer world of relationships (spouses, children) or between ethnic groups, social classes or international rivalries. So it seems we have a necessary love/hate relationship with trauma. (Skea)

The transposition of this observation and theory suggests that trauma has as much to do with the inner life of an individual as it does with the environment. Therefore it stands to reason that the postmodern condition (condition as a state of being, and/or symptom of illness) is in

fact predicated on the condition that people are not prepared adequately for their particular state of being in the world (including their inner psychic experience), and therefore continuously experience life as trauma, real and imagined.

Foster suggests that postmodernism possesses a bi-polar quality: "many artists seem driven by an ambition to inhabit a place of total affect *and* to de drained of affect altogether, to possess the obscene vitality of the wound and to occupy the radical nihility of the corpse [...] Pure affect: *It hurts, I can't feel anything*" (166). The inherent paradox of simultaneous pain and numbness suggests not only an endemic neurosis, but also corresponds to Kroker and Cook's panic scene. The paradox of the thrill and dread and the postmodern necessity of catastrophe are played out in the final scene of *Phaedra's Love*. Hippolytus's wish comes true: he is killed and he takes everyone down with him. Despite earlier indications that he desired accumulation--of junk food, fat, sexual excess, etc.--he also desires liquidation, a desire that is fulfilled as his body is deprived of sex identification when his genitals are "*cut off* [...] *thrown onto a barbecue,*" only to eventually be "*thrown to a dog*" (101). He is deprived of his inner reality, his guts, when his "*bowels are torn out and* [also] *thrown onto the barbecue*" (101). The liquidation of Hippolytus's body results in an ironic meal, further evidence of the relationship between gluttony and anorexia, consumption and loss. Arguably, in this moment Hippolytus is facing abjection, that primal fear of that which belongs to the primal abjection of being turned inside out, "guts sprawling"; he "falls beyond the limit--*cadere*, cadaver" (Kristeva 3). It is too easy to credit the crowd and Theseus with the dis-member-ment of Hippolytus; it must not be forgotten that as suicidal nihilist and product of excremental culture his agenda was to achieve disaccumulation, through the liquidation of desire (sexual anorexia and consumption as both an excess and a wasting), and self-

cancellation as a cancelled identity. His desire for self-extermination is evident in his oath to the Priest: "I killed a woman and I will be punished for it" (Kane 97). Hippolytus's elaborately staged theatre of cruelty has come to its desired and logical conclusion.

This chapter began with the suggestion that in *Phaedra's Love* Kane was attempting to portray a society that was becoming increasingly more violent, that Kane was using her art as a way of examining the issue of violence, and in particular sexual violence. By positioning her characters upon suicidal ledges, Kane's play suggests that violence is nihilistic in its origins, and that such violence also demands a violent representation. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse suggest in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* that "to regard certain practices as violent is never to see them just as they are. It is always to take up a position for or against them" (9). However, it is arguable that in *Phaedra's Love* violence, although always, if radically, coupled with Nietzsche's will toward nothingness and frequently married to sex, is just that: the bi-product of the detritus, waste, consumption and cancellation of an excremental culture.

Chapter Four

Crave

> All the leaves will fall on my breast,
> It will rain upon my soul night and day,
> The snow will burn my heart,
> I shall walk with cold and fire and death and snow, my feet will want to march toward where you sleep,
> But
> I shall go on living,
> Because you wanted me to be, above all things,
> Untamable,
> And, love, because you know that I am not just one man
> But all men (Pablo Neruda "The dead woman" *The Captain Verses* 109)

Crave is a play of the expression of memory suspended in the moment of the present and hovering on the brink of forgetting. Four unnamed voices blend in a symphonic effect to express the memory of love, loss, pain, and silence. And yet, each voice represents a distinct and individual experience. Some memories reach back as far as childhood, others express the inability to let go of lost relationships and still others ring as a desperate call to the future to deliver the individual from the repetition of the past and the stagnancy of his or her present reality. The following chapter analyses, through a close reading of the play-text, the major thematic issues of the play, and focuses on craving, desire and memory. For the section on memory I refer to Jeannette Malkin's *Memory Theatre and Postmodern Drama* and Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. I also examine the way in which Kane uses questions of and crisis in language to support these themes since she makes language itself a site of craving, desire and memory. The trope of pain corrosively shapes both themes and characterization throughout *Crave*. Accordingly, for this section I draw upon Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. I begin my analysis

with a short production history, followed by a minor discussion of production and casting issues with reference to the original Edinburgh production.[1] I contrast that production to the Canadian production performed at the Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival.[2]

In comparison to Kane's previous three plays, *Crave* is a departure from her established style; it is a very static play. *Crave* does not contain any of the depictions of graphic violence of her previous plays. Criticism of her first plays often included concerns that Kane was incapable of producing a play of any literary merit. *Crave* appears to be an answer to those jeers. *Crave* is a poetic piece, at times more a piece of poetry in performance than a play, in which Kane has purposely immobilized her characters, almost as in technical exercise. While the play may not contain graphic violence, the poetry is frequently violent, and at others tender. It is a no less challenging play to the audience for its lack of stage action.

Kane first work-shopped *Crave* for Paines Plough's Wild Lunch series under the pseudonym Marie Kelvedon, hoping to receive a more honest response to her play as a

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[1] Directed by Vicky Feathersone for Paines Plough performed at the Traverse in Edinburgh on August 13, 1998.

[2] In August of 1999 a production of *Crave* was toured by the English Suitcase Theatre Company, a company based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was directed by Kevin Williamson.

work of art rather than the work of the notorious theatrical "bad girl" Sarah Kane.[3] *Crave* was first performed professionally by "Paines Plough at the Traverse Theatre, in Edinburgh on 13 August 1998" (performance notes, Kane 154). It received favorable reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe and at the Dublin Fringe Festival in October of 1998, where was named "Critics' Choice" ("Dublin"). Its London debut took place in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in September 1998. Overall, the press received this play more warmly than her previous plays. Critics excused their abrupt change in attitude toward her with such statements as: "Sarah Kane has been born again as a playwright. She has turned her back on those scenes of violence and suffering with which *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, her first two headline seizing plays, were so lavishly studded" (de Jongh).[4] Alternatively, they referred to her in a neutral manner, calling her recent work "adventurous," or "challenging," and making statements revering her as the "controversial playwright who gave us *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* and... *Cleansed*... this fearless, blazingly talented writer" ("Sarah"). At worst, critics reluctantly conceded that she is indeed a noteworthy writer: "you can tell she is a real writer. There are one or two really fine speeches..." ("Craving"). Others took it upon themselves to engage with

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[3] Paines Plough is a theatre company nationally funded by "the Arts Council of England" with a mandate to produce "two new plays a year," and tour "them throughout the UK." It is a theatre company that prides itself on "discovering, developing, producing and touring work by the best of [new talent] writers throughout the UK." Paines Plough actively encourages writers to be "courageous in their work, to challenge our notions of theatre and the society we live in" (Preface to *Crave* Production Program). Kane was "Paines Plough's Writer-in-Residence [...] she selected and ran the company's first 'Wild Lunch' Writers' Group. Their work was presented in a series of readings at the Bridewell Theatre. Sarah was asked to write a short play to end the season, and wrote *Crave* under the pseudonym 'Marie Kelvedon'" (Introduction *Crave* Program).

[4] It is interesting to note the critic's choice in language with the phrase "born again," which to my mind is an obvious allusion to Kane's contentious past religious affiliation.

critics who had previously slammed Kane's work: "So Sarah Kane isn't a wordsmith, eh? There was never a great deal of truth in the view that…language wasn't really her thing" (Stratton). Another critic made a hesitant comparison to Beckett: "Beckett was the first dramatist to tantalize his audience with scraps of information, unmistakably vital to his characters' experience yet impossible to position exactly in their story. Kane's plays exhibit something of that same sensibility…" (Kingston).[5] And finally, critics were willing to revoke the title they loved best to give her by renaming her "the ex-enfant terrible" (Hagerty). For the most part, with the production of *Crave*, Kane positively swayed the opinion of almost every theatre critic in the United Kingdom.[6]

The script consists of four voices designated only as *C*, *M*, *B* and *A*. No information is divulged within the script or stage directions as to the particularities of their sex, age, or character traits.[7] These details are revealed in fragments as the play develops. The voices are never named during the play; the possible exception is *B* being referred to as 'David' by *M* and *C*. Despite the seemingly random barrage of fragmented or disconnected language, distinct narratives emerge through the collage of interlocking lines, which at times seem to be in dialogue with each other, and at other times seem to be random outbursts of language. Lines frequently seem to contradict each other and the

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[5] For an example of Beckett's experimental theatre see "Breath," first performed in Britain in 1970. In this play Beckett stages the sound and light of breathing, punctuated by two cries of distress (very particularly referred to as vagitus), set upon a "stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish" (11).

[6] Interestingly, Kane's work was widely received in Germany, German being the first language in which Kane's work was translated.

[7] Despite the fact that within the script the characters are not located by any particular traits, I will be referring to them as "he" or "she" according to the casting choices of both the original British and the subsequent Canadian production.

context of their origin is confused by their juxtaposition to other characters' speech. The effect, similar to *Phaedra's Love*, is a multitude of layers of meaning. *Crave* is a text that privileges the pleasures and problems of voice over the certainties of fixed action.

Because explicit character descriptions are non-existent, casting choices in regard to fulfilling the roles will have a direct effect on possible meanings for the audience. The effect of the ambiguity of this type of script is that it presents a relentless task for the audience or reader to attempt to create meaning from what are essentially fragments of speech. Furthermore, there is the potential for an infinite variety of interpretations depending on the manner in which directors choose to cast this play. The following paragraph demonstrates the way in which the casting choice for the original Paines Plough production inspired a particular understanding of the characters and therefore the play itself.

Critic Aleks Sierz and others argue, based on the Paines Plough Production, that the characters can be broken down as follows:

> an older man [A], the abuser, is infatuated with a young black girl [C] who cannot reciprocate because she is haunted by an abused past that she can neither remember nor forget. At the same time, an older woman [M] tries to seduce a young man [B] in the hope that he will father the child she is desperate for (Sierz 118).

However, this character breakdown relies upon the visual cues of the performance, and not solely the script. It would only be accurate as far as the Paines Plough production was concerned, or productions that choose to use this production as definitive. However, I would argue that *Crave* is a radically open-ended text, and that such a reading as that of

Sierz suggests limits, negates, and ignores its anti-foundationalist possibility for multiple readings. For example, in that production the actor cast in the role of *A*, was approximately 20-30 years older than *C*, who in turn happened to be black and very attractive. In casting one of the characters with a black actor, issues of racism complicate and bring to the surface other potential issues of endemic racial violence and abuse that might be latent in the text. In the English Suitcase production that I saw, none of the actors were significantly older or younger, and none were visibly identifiable as belonging to a racial minority. As a result, *A*'s desires and *C*'s pain took on a far different meaning for me compared to the reading that Sierz offers. It might be tempting to propose that the original Edinburgh production should serve as the definitive performance; however, since Kane did not leave specific or explicit directions in the script for casting, it seems reasonable that no definitive performance is possible. Given the script's contingent openness, it appears that Kane resisted a definitive performance and on principle I would argue that there does not appear to be any loss of meaning or impact to have cast it either way.

The staging of Kevin Williamson's English Suitcase Company's Canadian production of *Crave* I attended was relatively simple in both the set design and the blocking. The set design consisted of four chairs, upon which the actors were seated, in a row across the stage. From the press photos of the original Edinburgh performance, a staging similar to Williamson's production was used. Since this is not specifically called for in the stage directions, it is likely that Williamson chose this staging based on his knowledge of the Paines Plough production. Since I was unable to discover how much

influence Kane had over the original production, I can only assume that, given the close working relationship of Kane and Vicky Featherstone, Kane had authorized the choices in the original performance.[8] In my reading, the effect of the row of chairs presents the characters as interview subjects during a television talk show. It is stiff and at times unnatural when the lines might more naturally demand a range of physical movement disallowed by the restrictions of the production's blocking. This physical stasis contributes to the emotional intensity and urgency of the speech, to the emphasis and importance of the words these voices speak. The actors never move from this position. The only little movement allowed in the production included characters crossing and uncrossing their legs, and lighting and smoking cigarettes. The ability to shift in one's seat gives the illusion of choice and will, while the need to smoke a cigarette reinforces the characters' addiction latent in their cravings.

Thematically, *Crave* investigates the motives and implications of what it means to crave something: that which one does not have, or that which one once had, but has since lost, or that which one cannot quite define. Some of the cravings are for what seems common, simple, or pure. At times there is a sinister dimension to the cravings of some of the characters suggesting an inherent belief that what one craves often destroys. Smokers crave cigarettes, and *B* tells us, apropos of nothing, that he "smoke[s] till [he's] sick" (Kane 156). Later when he says, "I shake when I don't have it" (159), he could be

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[8] When I attempted to arrange for James MacDonald to speak with me prior to attending the premiere production of *4:48 Psychosis* , I discovered that anyone who had ever worked with Kane was very much unwilling to discuss anything in regards to Sarah Kane. I believe that this had to do with the fact that certain issues surrounding Kane's death had yet to be resolved and that there may have been legal ramifications that discouraged people from discussing her work for fear of negative repercussions.

referring to cigarettes, or coffee, or another commonly craved gratification, sex. In any case, his craving is associated with negative consequences, although the pleasure of satisfying that craving is undeniable. When *B* says, "Rape me" (199), this character's act of craving itself becomes destructive.[9] *B*'s articulated desire here undermines the normally understood conditions of desire, and craving becomes distinct from choice. If one chooses one's objects of desire, cravings germinate within the physiology of the person; it is a sensation over which little choice can be exercised outside of choosing to satisfy that craving or to cope with the gap created by an unsatisfied craving.

The voices express, for instance, cravings to revisit particular painful times in their lives so that an event might be better understood, or in the vain hope that its outcome might be altered. This is a craving for the ability to remember with ascendancy, not fear, and to confront trauma. *C* says, "Listen. I am here to remember. I need to…remember. I have this grief and I don't know why" (171). Sometimes this need for redemptive recall is expressed by the characters remembering experiences of others. *A* speaks the following:

> A small girl became increasingly paralysed by her parents' frequently violent rows. Sometimes she would spend hours standing completely still in the toilet, simply because that was where she happened to be when the fight began. Finally, in moments of calm, she would take bottles

[9] This line provides the perfect opportunity to problematize sexuality and gender. In both the original and the Edmonton productions, B was cast as a man, which serves to complicate the stated desire for rape, understanding that rape is generally a crime committed by males against females.

> of milk from the fridge or doorstep and leave them in places where she may later become trapped. Her parents were unable to understand why they found bottles of sour milk in every room in the house. (185)

This does not seem likely to be *A*'s memory, at least not according to the casting of the two productions with which this chapter is concerned. In both productions *A* was cast as a man, which problematizes not only the reliability of memory, but also issues of gender construction and codification. The significance of this transferred memory to any of the characters is never fully explained. The transferability of memory in *Crave*, however, gives the illusion that memory is a shared experience, yet the very nature of these characters' traumatic relationship to memory is rooted in the individual's solitary relationship to memory, and its basic unsharability, hence the traumatic effects of memory.

The characters often crave the ability to ask someone to fulfill their desires, and despite that desire being for something to occur in the future, it is intimately tied to memory. In certain instances, the play explores the consequences of failure to acquire that which one craves. As intangible as they are, these cravings often resemble yearning, in particular a yearning for something from the past. This aspect of craving is intertwined with the demands of memory. For example, *A* states: "I want to sleep next to you and do your shopping and carry your bags and tell you how much I love being with you but they keep making me do stupid things…" (168). In this monologue, the audience witnesses *A*'s interior monologue that expresses the desire to revisit the past, or to reinitiate certain events. The inability to achieve this moment produces the trauma. There is a hint that *A* may be experiencing delusions, as evidenced by his statement: "they keep making [him]

do stupid things." Or, "they" might refer to the memories acting as agents that thwart his abilities, and are responsible for his making bad decisions. These cravings operate on a physiological level, outside the realm of desire. Satisfaction and release from haunting memory will not be experienced until these cravings are fulfilled.

Kane uses language in different ways to support the characters' expression of unrequited desire and thwarted cravings. One of the ways Kane manipulates language in *Crave* is through her economic use of it. Often, her characters speak no more than one, two or three word sentences or sentence fragments, in a short staccato-like rhythm. Their lines are often incomplete sentences that hang in the air, fragments of a thought, or an attempt to communicate an emotional flickering that language cannot. An example is *B*'s minuscule line, in which he expresses the desire "To die" (155). Other characters' words often create the illusion of serving to complete the sentences of others with words of their own. In this aspect of Kane's word play, opportunities for a multiplicity of meanings proliferate. For example, *C*'s line follows *B*'s line: "Somewhere outside the city, I told my mother, You're dead to me" (155). This could be read as a continuation of *B*'s line which itself is a possible, but random continuation of *A*'s question: "What do you want?" (155). Read altogether the dialogue seems to fill in its own gaps: *What do you want? To die. Somewhere outside the city, I told my mother, You're dead to me*. As suddenly as it merges and almost forms a continuous thread, it veers off in another direction. Or, the dialogue could be read as expressions of completely separate incidents, part of the stream of consciousness style of the piece. The economic use of language results in the creation of the sensation of extreme lack.

While the majority of *Crave*'s lines are short, clipped, and economical, one monologue stands out in jarring contrast to this tendency and to great emotional effect. At approximately one quarter into the play, *A* launches into a nearly two-page list of cravings and desires, disappointments and pleadings. His speech is a run on sentence comprised of a list of experiences that he has probably at one time shared with the person that he addresses. Some of the desires are intimate and express a yearning for romance: "massage your neck, and kiss your feet and hold your hand." Other desires are more mundane and express a commitment to the daily routine of life: "type your letters and carry your boxes." Other cravings are for things that he only wishes had taken place or could take place if given the chance again: "want to buy you a kitten I'd get jealous of because it would get more attention than me…" (169). The sheer length of this speech and its emotional intensity renders this moment an emotional climax in the play, as the character hovers on the brink of either breaking through the repetitive cycle of memory, or of being destroyed by it. He is unable to achieve this, and the play returns to the clipped speech of inarticulateness.

There is also a repetitive aspect to *A*'s speech situated not only in the words themselves, but also in the sentiment. For example the repeated use of the conjunction "and," allows the monologue to run on in a breathless fashion and is repeated over and over. The repetitive quality predominates when the reader senses that this is not the first time that *A* has expressed, or at least harboured, a craving for these things. It is not the first time he has suffered the agony of having these cravings denied, a fact which becomes more evident toward the end as the speech gains momentum and moves away

from the nostalgia to the present anger and frustration that is a result of thwarted desire. For example:

> and buy you presents you don't want and take them away again and ask you to marry me and you say no *again* but keep on asking because though you think I don't mean it I do always have from the first time I asked you […] and think it's all over but hang on in for just ten more minutes before you throw me out of your life and forget who I am. (170)

A's monologue breaks off at this point in a breathless string of adverbs and adjectives: "and somehow somehow somehow communicate some of the overwhelming undying overpowering unconditional all-encompassing heart-enriching mind-expanding on-going never-ending love I have for you " (170). He recommences a few pages further on, this time carried away by the anger surfacing in his previous speech, and at this point the audience begins to understand that at some point this relationship turned sinister, or at best was exploitative and manipulative. Suddenly the craving encodes revenge rather than the wish to return to a happier time, which may possibly be the expression of a taboo desire that betrays a very bleak view of love and relationships. Within this speech there is no hope for redemption, for healing or for love without suffering:

> and I will lie to you from day one and use you and screw you and break your heart because you broke mine first and you will love me more each day until the weight is unbearable and your life is mine and you'll die alone because I will take what I want then walk away and owe you nothing…fuck that life I have lost you now. (178)

It is unclear whom *A* addresses. The proximity of lines suggests, but due to the established conventions of the dialogue does not necessitate, that he may be speaking to *C*. Indications that they might be connected can be found at the end of *A*'s longest monologue, where *C*'s line overlaps with the end of his speech: "This has to stop this has to stop this has to stop" (171). Overall the speech is a muddle of emotions and cacophony of sounds, and eventually the lengthiness of his expression cannot be sustained as *A*'s ability to articulate disintegrates, while *C* assumes a position of an interior voice which sensors the speech and stops it. In the manner of overlapping lines, the various voices act as interior or exterior consciousnesses for one another.

One of the most complete and definitive dramatizations of an instance of a communicative relationship can be traced through the characters *M* and *B*. *M*, as cast by these productions and indicated by several lines, is conscious of her age, which is significant because identity politics raises gendered issues such as the unpredictable pressure of aging, as evidenced by *M*'s two lines, "The heat is going out of me" (156), and "I want a child" (157). To clarify the urgency and double bind of the situation, she also says: "Time is passing and I don't have time" (157). This is an honest desire, plainly stated. The craving for a child is not necessarily self-destructive, and yet it is this desire and its lack of fulfillment that will drive *M* to despair. At times the proximity of her lines to those of *B* suggests that he is the man with whom she desires to have an affair, as in the following exchange:

> B. Will you come round and seduce me? I need to be seduced by an older woman.
>
> M. I'm not an older woman.

B. Older than me, not older *per se* (158)

Subsequent dialogue reveals that *M* may be trying to convince *B* to father her child, when *M* says, "I want a child", and *B* replies with "I can't help you" (157). Their exchange represents a desire to communicate with the past, to reach for something that was once real, but now reduced to an emotional, repetitive memory and perpetual craving. This scene is an example of Kane's expression of the limitations of language as a device for accessing memory and even for communication itself. Despite the interchange of words, these characters are failing to communicate to and with each other in a meaningful way. Kane demonstrates language's poor communicative power by overlapping lines, and by interspersing one conversation with another.

Here I present the following interchange but leave out other characters' lines in order to demonstrate that, although in the script they are separated by other characters' lines, they could be read as an exchange solely between *M* and *B*.

M. David?

B. Yeah.

M. Do you remember me?

B. Yeah.

M. You've forgotten.

B. I don't think

M. Yes.... I looked for you. All over the city.

B. I really don't

M. Yes. Yes.... And now I have found you (156)

There are awkward silences and gaps, things left unsaid by *M* and *B*, but in the script these gaps seem to be filled in by *C* and *A* while carrying on their own conversation. For instance, *C* speaks that which *B* cannot say: "I couldn't forget" (156). When *A* flatly states, "I'm a paedophile" (156), a line which by its juxtaposition to *M*'s line, suggests that the statement could refer to the older woman's attempted seduction of the younger man. At one point *C* says " Leave" (157); she could also be speaking for either *B* or *M*. Within these gaps and between such fragments, the cravings and desires take on multiple and at times sinister proportions. If there may be unspoken secrets behind the cravings, the audience cannot evaluate the value and meaning of what they see and hear.

The study of the inadequacy of language in the play is reinforced by the issue raised by the use of a single name, David, which is spoken only twice. This occurs once when character *M* seems to address *B* (examined in more detail below), and a second time when character *C*, who is involved in this conversation by her lines' proximity to *B's* and *M*'s, begins a drawn out episode of the memory of a sexual assault: "The navy denim dress I wore at six, the elastic red and blue belt tight around my waist, nylon socks, the hard crust of scabs on my knees, the metal barred climbing frame between my legs, David--" (176). Whether or not *B* is actually named David, or whether both voices that have been cast as females are referring to the same David, the issue of rape, of raping and being raped is a theme that runs through a good portion of B's lines. Perhaps it is *B* who is actually the main cause, or the precedent for *C*'s traumatic experience in relationships. *A* may have been involved with *C*, but the reference to the name David, emerges as an identity signifier, and in a play of identity void, this is a significant reference to identity chaos. Furthermore, the proximity and content of *B*'s lines to *C*'s support my

interpretation. In the following example, *B*'s lines seem to respond to *C*'s memory and *A* acts as an interrogator.

C. Purple heather scratching my legs.

A. Anything but this.

C. A handsomé blond fourteen year old, his thumbs hooked over his jeans half exposing his buttocks, his blue eyes full of the sun.

B. Sick of it man, I'm totally fucking sick of it.

A. What did you do?

B. Nothing, nothing. I did nothing (176)

C's memory trails off and she communicates more visceral memory sensations for a while before she continues with, "It's my virginity…A fourteen year old to steal my virginity on the moor and rape me till I come" (178). The connection is fleeting, momentary and impressionistic, yet highly significant. The memory, which contains an identity, creates confusion for the character and controversy for the readers or audience members as they are asked to consider the possibility of sexual pleasure within an act of sexual violence. Delineating the confusion that *C* experiences, *C* states: "You get mixed messages because I have mixed feelings" (165). Kane posits this potential, not in order to suggest that sexual violence is ultimately pleasurable, but that pleasure is often sought in violence, when violence becomes the standard by which pleasure is measured. This first sexual experience is a *sexual* experience despite its violence, and it is traumatic in and of itself. It remains a traumatic memory because it has become definitive for this character of sex. The violence of the memory and the associated emotions are likely to resurface during each subsequent sexual encounter, even if it is consensual.

Kane problematizes the issue of rape with the statement, "rape me till I come" (178), suggesting that orgasmic pleasure can be associated with the act of rape. Kane's conflation creates controversy, especially amongst groups who have worked very hard to change attitudes toward sexual violence and toward patriarchal assumptions of the victim's complicity.[10] On the one hand, Kane may be suggesting that there is an inherent violence in all sexual relations. On the other, the line might indicate a radical stance toward sex and even toward pleasure. Kane offers controversy: is it possible to take pleasure in such pain? Does society's taboo against such pleasure combined with pain contribute to feelings of guilt and confusion? At the risk of offending victims of rape and advocates of anti-violence against women, Kane proposes to her audience that they consider, through staging this character's confusion, the possibility that rape's violence entangles the violence of power with the violence and power of sexuality, and as such it uses sex as the means by which to carry out the violence. Furthermore, sex, as a means by which lovers express desire is the means of unity with another. Kane's brutal theatricality and embrace of violence may posit that the rapist in this scenario (but certainly not all rapists) might forcibly have had sex with *C* in the erroneous attempt to form a bond and

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[10] In Hazelwood and Burgess' *Practical Aspects of Rape Investigation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, many biases are outlined suggesting that prevalent attitudes toward rape have more to do with "rape myths" than with the actual assault itself. Furthermore, they argue: "our society's belief system supports and promotes rape in many ways. Victims have difficulty convincing others--police, hospital personnel, prosecuters, judges, and jurors--that they were victimized. The problem exists because… the general public often have in their minds an image of rape that does not allow rape scenarios outside the parametres of that image" (7). According to Hazelwood and Burgess views that are commonly held by perpetrators of assault, such as "She semi-struggled but deep down inside I think she felt it was a fantasy come true," are drawn from a cultural and social "vocabulary" that "reflect[s] what they have reason to believe others will find acceptable" (8).

gain acceptance from the individual he has raped. I am arguing that through *C*'s monologue Kane is provocatively staging sexist attitudes still prevalent in societies that hold the victim of a sexual violence partially, if not entirely, responsible for the crime.

In staging the characters' desires as contradictory, as in the example above, Kane is drawing upon a postmodern technique of portraying subjects as non-unified, as possessing a fragmented and non-linear, even schizophrenic consciousness. Kane does not resolve these character dilemmas for the audience or reader, but instead she leaves her audience to reconcile these contradictions. Often the contradiction remains irresolvable. For example, as has been established, *M* asks *B* to father her child, though *B* is resisting a relationship with *M*. Yet as the play progresses, it seems that *B* pursues *M*. *M* declares that she's "Never met a man [she] trusted" (161). *B* seems genuinely concerned when he asks: "You trust me?" (162). And *M* replies, quite matter-of-factly: "This has nothing to do with you [...] I'm not interested in you" (162). These contradictions enact the issues around sexual politics. I think that Kane is playing with prevalent assumptions regarding sexuality and sexual behaviour.

The characters' contradictory desires become complicated further because *B* has commanded: "Rape me" (199). There is the suggestion in the following exchange, that in her quest for a child, *M* has sexually assaulted *B*:

> M. You asked me to seduce you.
>
> B. Not tie me up. (167)

B asks *M*: "And don't you think that a child conceived by rape would suffer" (162)? Yet *B*'s feelings about the encounter are anything but straightforward. *B* admits that he is a "sporadic addict...Addicted to illness" (168). It seems he is actually addicted to sex,

specifically with *M*. He says: "I disgust myself [...] I think about you [...] Talk about you [...] I like you in my system [...] In a day or two I'll go back for another affair, although the affair is now so on-going it almost constitutes a relationship [...] Satisfied with nothing [...] I came back [...] There's no one like you [...] I keep coming back" (173-75). His gradual realization is that he is in love, perhaps more with the idea of love than the person with whom he is involved. *A* summarizes it for everyone: "You've fallen in love with someone that doesn't exist" (190).

Generally, the scenes discussed above have a timeless quality about them in that they exist outside of the world's regular, chronological time; they take place within the realm of the characters' associative or stream-of-consciousness memory. However, other scenes seem more urgently a part of the text's represented reality, as though they are happening in the 'here and now,' such as the following scenario which at once occupies a banal position in the characters' experience with each other and conveys the sense of having taken place during their affair. On the surface it appears that *B* is losing patience with *M* because of the refusal to agree to make a craft project for him. However, in the character memory time *B* is actually losing patience with *M* because *M* has ceased to be actively engaged with *B*'s desires. Again, I present the presumed interchange between *M* and *B* by leaving out the other characters' lines. I realize the amount of readerly authorship such a move involves and how Kane's writing demands such presumptions and risky interpretive acts.

B It's very nice. Will you make me one?

M. It's made of egg shells and concrete.

B. Will you make me one?

M. Concrete, paint and egg shells.

B. I didn't ask what it was made of, I asked if you'd make me one.

M. Every time I have an egg I stick the shell on there and spray it.

B. Will. You. Make. Me. One. (161)

The banality of such an exchange belies an undercurrent of inexpressibility. *M* continues to prattle about the egg shell craft rather than address *B*'s question, which thinly veils that which both characters need to say but cannot. A tension simmers as *B*, barely able to contain patience, haltingly speaks the final line. The words are code for the frustration that both characters experience due to unfulfilled desire.

The craving for conflict, the ambivalence of simultaneously desiring and resisting closure, also inhibits Kane's play, perhaps because of the postmodern realization of the impossibility of closure. [11] Kane uses this theme to portray her characters' inner conflict, the inability to achieve personal--and therefore textual--resolution. She achieves this resistance to closure in part by quoting a couple of lines from Hamlet's famous speech "To be, or not to be."

C. To die.

B. To sleep.

M. No more (158)

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[11] Here, I understand this aspect of postmodernism as it applies to theatre as Patrice Pavis defines it, in *The Classical Heritage of Postmodern Drama: The Case of the Postmodern*, as a resistance to closure. It is "no longer [an] attempt to imitate speakers in the act of communicating, nor do they [postmodern playwrights] lock themselves into indecipherable words. They present text which--even if it still takes the form of words alternately expressed by different speakers--can no longer be recapitulated or resolved, or lead to action. Their sort of text addresses itself as a whole to the audience, like a global poem tossed in the readers' laps to be taken or left as they please" (8)

Hamlet speaks these lines as a man haunted by his dead father, the murdered King who at that moment desires the finality of eternal sleep in order to "end/ The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks/ that flesh is heir to" (Shakespeare 950-51). Hamlet, like many of Kane's characters, is irresolvably conflicted. Hamlet observes: "conscience does make cowards of us all" (951). However, it is not that his conscience works to prevent him from making the wrong decision, it prevents him from making any sort of decision at all. All of Kane's characters are figuratively asking "To be, or not to be" at some point or another. At what point, however, must these individuals take responsibility for their lives and "grow up and stop blaming mother" (Kane 191), so to speak? The effect in Kane's play is that characters speak when the moment might better be served by silence. This is the expression of a craving that desires release from the unbearable present, determined by an equally unbearable past. It is also the desire for conflicting effect. It is the realization of being caught between conflicting desires of wanting and not wanting to be alone:

C. LEAVE

A. COME BACK

All. STAY (159)

The characters crave solitude but desire companionship, or they desire solitude, but crave companionship. They do not know what they want.

Kane invokes *Hamlet*'s famous speech in order to present one of the underlying themes that unifies an otherwise disunified play. It is a theme that is not easily summarized however, but rather, one that encompasses basic, irreconcilable, unresolvable human predicaments and experience. For example, the predicament *A*

describes is a common situation that results in confusion for the child: "A mother beats her child savagely because it runs out in front of a car" (161). The child is punished because of the danger his/her behaviour poses. The mother beats the child because she loves the child and would be mortified if anything should happen to it. However, the child learns that the world is an unpredictable and dangerous place, equally on the street and in the care of her mother. Violence is the vehicle that conveys communication when language fails. Just as Hamlet is immobilized by the impasse that he has reached over the circumstances of his father's death, Kane's characters arrive at impasses of their own in response to the variety of predicaments presented throughout the play. For example, many of the characters express a desire for emptiness, which is most logically death: "To be free of memory…Free of desire…Lie low provoke nothing" (198). They are also cognizant of the fact that escape into death is a double bind: "If you commit suicide you'll only have to come back and go through it all again" (188). Hamlet's immobilization and desire for what amounts to a state of nothingness, or the desire to disappear into a void in which he can escape the need to make a decision is used and reflected and then perpetuated in *Crave*. Kane withholds closure for her readers or audience for these predicaments rendering the play an expression of these irreconcilable, insatiable cravings.

Connected to the themes of craving and desires, is the notion of memory. Most of what occurs within *Crave*, comes from memory: memory of what has been lost and is desired anew, what one has desired and never had, and the memory of desire itself. To achieve a thorough analysis of memory within the play, I draw upon Jeannette Malkin's theory of *Memory Theatre and Postmodern Drama*. Her work on "the discourses on

memory [,] the study of postmodern aesthetics, and the reading of late-twentieth-century theatre texts" (1) has been useful in providing a means by which to enter into further analysis of memory in *Crave*. Complicating the issue of theatre and memory is trauma and its relationship to memory. This feature is found alongside of memory in *Crave*, as most of the memories are fatefully bound to instances of trauma.

Malkin states that "postmodernism is crucially bound up with agendas of remembering and forgetting, serving at least in part, to re-call the past from repression or from its canonized 'shape' in order to renegotiate the traumas, oppressions, and exclusions of the past" (1). Similarly, *Crave* seeks to renegotiate remembered space in a simultaneous, contradictory act of remembering and forgetting, seeking both an expression and a silencing of memory. *Crave* presents Malkin's concept of postmodern memory, as a construction of memory that has been freed from the constraints of linearity and the assumption that memory is accurate and reliable. *Crave* calls into question the omniscience of the various narrators or voices. Within *Crave's* dialogue can be found gaps and inexplicable statements within the characters' memories as they manifest in fragments more accurately resembling the emotional response, rather than the actual memory itself. The result is the enactment of a demonstration of the inherent contradiction of the oscillating space of memory, which in turn results in a destablization of language which subsequently destabilizes the reliability of the reality of language, the role of language in regard to memory, and the way in which prevalent narrative norms govern the way in which we remember. *Crave* displays this postmodern sensibility as described by Malkin. Additionally, it exhibits a heightened awareness of the constructedness of memory and consequently history as a by-product of memory, that

seeks to do exactly what Malkin theorizes: present an act of remembering that is a reshaping and representation of lived experience that seeks to retrieve and enact memory in a completely new manner. The act of remembering is exactly that: an act. Acting implies a simulation, a reproduction of the original, but nevertheless an attempt that seeks as closely as possible to imitate the original, so much so that emotions may be inspired or remembered that for all intents and purposes resemble the originals. If memory needs to be (re)enacted, then it can be reenacted repeatedly and in an infinite variety of manners.[12]

Crave achieves this reenactment of memory through the form of the play itself. By scrambling the sequential linearity of the characters' experiences through disordered, disconnected, and overlapping dialogue, Kane has achieved a rupture from the presumed linearity and chronological logic of memory. Kane's characters reenact their experiences, feelings, and cravings in a fragmented, stream of consciousness style of word play. *Crave* presents to the audience a theatrical space in which the characters purposefully recall and, by virtue of evocation, enact particular memories. The memories are often emotionally based and as a result, the effect in this play is that the reenactment of the memories inspires a re-visitation of the traumatic basis for many of the experiences. The emotional impact for the audience is one in which it often feels as if the trauma is occurring within the moment of remembering. For example, one of C"s memories evokes a memory process that culminates in an emotional reliving of various episodes of sexual assault and the resulting breakdown. It takes pages for the entirety of the episode to manifest, and it is only through an active effort on the part of the audience or reader that one is able to

[12] Here, I have intentional parenthesized the "re" in order to communicate that it is not simply a reproduction of the initial act, but a repetition.

reconstruct a linear, semi-coherent narrative of the events that took place. The event is summarized as follows: *C* is traumatized as a result of a rape, cited earlier in this essay, that took place on a moor by a 14-year old boy. Her feelings toward that experience, however, are ambiguous because she also reports that while she was raped, she experienced orgasm. She is not sure how to reconcile this experience. This conflicting experience, coupled with memories in which she reports witnessing her "father beat [her] mother with a walking stick" (179), impairs her ability to relate to members of the opposite sex. Later, presumably when she is an adult, she reports that the man she is involved with "buys [her] a make-up kit, blushes and lipsticks and eyeshadow. And [she] paint[s] [her] face in bruises and blood and cuts and swelling, and on the mirror in deep red, UGLY" (180), reinforcing an interpretation that confirms her inability to relate positively to the opposite sex. The result is her negative self-perception, as evidenced in the above quote and the impact it has on her ability to accept herself for who she is. *C* returns to the present of the play, and makes the following statement about herself in the third person: "She is currently having some kind of nervous breakdown and wishes she'd been born black, male and more attractive" (182). Further evidence that her memories, and the complicated emotions that accompany those memories, have caused a conscious dissociation from her identity, is supported by the following line: "She's talking about herself in the third person because the idea of being who she is, of acknowledging that she is herself, is more than her pride can take [...] She's sick to the fucking gills of herself and wishes wishes wishes that something would happen to make life begin" (183). *C*'s earliest negative memories of sex, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships have contributed to *C*'s negative self-perception and desire to be "cast" as someone else.

Trapped by the labyrinth of these memories C has only managed to find an escape through fantasy and dissociation of her own damaged embodiment.

While one may speak in metaphors about memory being a landscape of experience in *Crave*, I propose that memory within the play actually functions in a specific, almost literal manner. Memory is the interiorization of remembered space and experience, the voices of which function as preverbal, subconscious utterances. In *Crave*, language is the character and memory is the characterization. This enactment of memory and access to language bears a resemblance to Freudian theories of memory and mourning, during which can occur a psychobabble of language and its slippery relationship with memory.[13] An overview of the play yields an impression of the work as resembling the word salad communication of a psychotic episode. Upon closer inspection the text is full of gaps, silences, moments in which the voices suffer from a dramatic form of alogia, the inability to find or speak words. For example, at one point, all four voices are unable to articulate anything else but a "*short one syllable scream*" (186-87), as demanded by the playwright's stage directions. A little later, C "*[e]mits a formless cry of despair*" (191). These moments act less as an indication of a mental disorder than testimony to the failure of language to fulfill the communication requirements of certain memories, and more importantly to communicate emotions for which words do not exist.

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[13] Here I am thinking specifically of Freud's statement that "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (252), and the recognition that melancholy can frequently slip into mania (262).

Another example of the way in which Kane uses language in a provocative manner is the insertion of lines in foreign languages. These occurrences of multilingual speech raise questions of postmodern intertextuality: Do these lines refer to a play, a film, a book or a television show in a language other than English? More immediately, their presence is a direct effort to block communication. The seven lines in question are spoken in Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, and German, and unless one happened to possess knowledge of those languages, one would not know how to translate the lines.[14] Use of foreign languages renders these lines inaccessible for the majority of audience members thereby creating another gap in the narrative and communication. The lines contribute to the overall theme in the play of the failure of language to effect meaning. One might be inclined to believe that if one could simply translate these lines, it would provide an explanation, perhaps even offer a key to the play's meaning. However, when these lines are translated, they provide very little in the way of explanation. In fact, they are cryptic, empty discourse severed from its original and meaningful context and therefore rendered meaningless in the play. I believe that Kane includes these foreign language lines for two reasons. She might be planting a red herring for audience members actively seeking meaning. Pursuit of the lines' meanings will ultimately lead them nowhere but through a labyrinth of false promises. I also believe that Kane inserts these lines in order to demonstrate the predominant emptiness of speech acts. These lines are a demonstration of language's inability to communicate. For example, "Meni ni iz džepa, ni u džep"(It's neither in my pocket, nor out of it) (201), is an ambiguous statement, wholly lacking in meaning in terms of what *B* might be referring to when he speaks this line. Interestingly,

[14] In the play's text a translation of the lines is provided for the actors and director.

all of the lines in foreign languages are spoken by *B*. In my mind this suggests that Kane constructs B in such a way as to suggest that despite B's linguistic prowess, he is unable to speak his feelings, and clearly communicate his desire and cravings. He remains inarticulate and his memory, his present and his future are mired in meaninglessness.

According to Malkin, memory theatre, as a genre per se, intends to

> evoke erased memories of national pasts, to recontextualize, reopen canonized memory 'narratives,' rethink taboo discourses, intervene in the politics of memory and repression, and to engage, and occasionally enrage the memoried consciousness of its audience--with whose memory, and repression, these plays are in constant dialogue. (3)

As Malkin's theory applies to *Crave*, the characters' experiences often portray instances sure to enrage the moral sensibilities of the audience by including that which is undoubtedly considered taboo. An example of this would be the memory that *A* shares:

> In a lay-by on the motorway going out of the city, or maybe in, depending in which way you look at it, a small dark girl sits in the passenger seat of a parked car. Her elderly grandfather undoes his trousers and it pops out of his pants, big and purple. (157-58) [15]

Kane does not endow this event with a moral judgment of her own. The character's obvious suffering, combined with the fragmented, disconnected and unbidden intrusion of this memory reveals the inherent social ill: sexual incest and abuse. I propose that

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[15] Again, according to the way in which *Crave* was cast in the two productions to which I am referring, it is not likely that this memory belongs to *A*. Cast in such a manner, Kane is problematizing further the issue of gender and memory. She is also reinforcing the notion that memory is a collective experience.

Kane is positing such occurrences as incest and sexual abuse by acquaintances as more common than they are generally accepted to be, and more debilitating over a lifetime than generally understood.

The play's privileging of language portrays the characters as if participating in a forum in which they are invited to present these memories, or in some cases hidden desires, a theatrical strategy that places the play within the genre of memory theatre as defined by Malkin: "often memories burst upon the stage without order, causality, direction or coherence, as though in reaction to what Heiner Müller [and James Joyce] has called the nightmare of history" (9). [16] This reaction of memory is so overwhelmingly represented in *Crave* that the reader or audience member is brought into another mode of existence: memory severed from its moorings. The characters' memories and experiences do exactly that: burst onto stage. The resulting effect of this entrance into the forum of memory is at times shocking and seemingly violent because of the inherent lack of context, temporality, and order. In real life, it is not customary to read lives in this seemingly haphazard manner, and it is similarly not customary to witness this narrative practice in the theatre. The entire structure of the play seems to exemplify Malkin's assertions regarding memory and postmodern theatre: "voice and image is privileged over narrative and character, the collective over the individual, the interactive over the self-sufficient, intact text" (Malkin 7). *Crave* exemplifies this genre not only through its use of language, but also the static production blocking and the non-identity of the characters, which also gives the impression of collective experience.

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[16] In Joyce's *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus, laboring under his burden of the past claims: that "history [...] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (Joyce 2.377).

The play, in its static physical form is pure voice, rendering the portrayed experiences into a collective experience, rooted in the individual, rather than simply the particular experience of an individual. An example of this is when *M* asks, "Haven't we been here before" (158). The division between where one individual's experience ends and another's begins is often blurred or arbitrary. Thoughts that one character initiates are often picked up and continued by another. This play relies upon the role of the audience as interpreter, as an agent whose duty is to make sense of the linguistic jumble and non-existent boundaries of the self. *M* appears to acknowledge the cryptic, contradictory features of the play when she addresses the audience: "And if this makes no sense to you, then you understand perfectly" (159). The play practically begs the audience to play the role of the psychoanalyst, to bear witness to its articulation of trauma. During one line, *C* appears to address the audience: "Listen. I am here to remember. I need to [...] remember. I have this grief and I don't know why" (171). The presence of the audience enables the commencement of the act of remembering. Furthermore, the ability to articulate memory is portrayed as fundamental to the survival of the individual, as evidenced by *B*'s fear: "If I lose my voice I am through" (194). The ability to find this voice, to articulate the problematic memory is the challenge of postmodern theatre, and the challenge in this play. The challenge and the necessity of remembering are confounded by the postmodern crisis of language and memory.

Malkin outlines exactly the way in which postmodern attitudes affect language governed processes such as memory:

> Within postmodernism [...] there has occurred a shift in *the way we remember*, and hence in the way culture, and for our purposes, the theatre,

> represents and reenacts remembering. Where once memory called up coherent, progressing narratives of experienced life, or at least unlocked the significance of hidden memory for the progressions of the present, this kind of enlightenment has broken down in postmodernism and given way to the nonnarrative reproduction of conflated, disrupted, repetitive, and moreover collectively retained and articulated fragments. (4)

Crave exemplifies this postmodern phenomenon in the way individual characters' pasts are related to the audience. *C*, for example is at times unable to articulate some memories, and at other times articulates memories she can't possibly remember, things that occur before she is born which demonstrate most succinctly Malkin's idea that memories can be collectively retained:

> I ran through a poppy field at the back of my grandfather's farm. When I burst through the kitchen door I saw him sitting with my grandmother on his lap, He kissed her on the lips and caressed her breast. They looked around and saw me, smiling at my confusion. When I related this to my mother more than ten years later she stared at me oddly and said, "That didn't happen to you. It happened to me. My father died before you were born. When that happened I was pregnant with you, but I didn't know until the day of his funeral." (Kane 159)

There are several issues intertwined in the type of memory and trauma being proposed in this scenario. First of all, as is a common theme throughout Kane's oeuvre, sexuality and sexual experience are more often than not confusing and traumatic experiences, and may incidentally be transformed into a traumatic experience when there is a loss of access or

control over that memory. Secondly, as proposed by Malkin, memory is not exclusively an individual experience but is collective. Kane adds yet another dimension to this theory: that it is possible for memory to be trans-generational. *C*'s mother's memory is so powerful and definitive that the memory becomes a part of her physiological being. It becomes a part of her genetic blueprint, so to speak. Thirdly, that memory is repetitive for the individual as well as through generations. The repetitiveness of traumatic memory is proposed by Kane in *C*'s line: "I believe in anniversaries. That a mood can be repeated even if the event that caused it is trivial or forgotten. In this case it is neither" (155). Neither trivial nor forgotten, the mood and the memory are of paramount importance to the lived experience of the individual. Also suggested in this line is the idea that the memory of trauma is calculated, and intentional, and yet simultaneously involuntary. There is something essential about its existence, a purpose to its repeated surfacing. Furthermore, like birthday or wedding anniversaries the repetition of memory is ritualistic.

Another, example of this trans-generational memory, albeit one that is not associated with sexual trauma, can be found when *B* asks *M* about his nose. *C* determines that it is "Broken" (162), and yet according to *B*, he's "never broken a bone in [his] body" (162). However, his father had his nose broken, "smashed his nose in a car crash when he was 18. And I've got this. Genetically impossible, but there it is. We pass these messages faster than we think and in ways we don't think possible" (162). This time the physical memory of the trauma is manifest in a physical feature in the subsequent generation. Not only does memory repeat itself as an anniversary within the individual, but the sign of the memory can also be passed from one generation to another. Kane

literalizes the metaphor of "running in the family." In actuality, subsequent generations may take it upon themselves to remember things that happened before their time, in the form of stories or a family chronicle, but in *Crave* Kane also fashions memory as involuntary, materializing it within physical appearance.

The repetitive aspect of memory, and particularly of a traumatic one, is something that all of the characters experience and enact. The characters plainly state at various points in the play that they keep returning to the entanglement of craving, memory and trauma. *M* sets the repetitive tone early in the play by asking: "Haven't we been here before" (158)? The context of the question makes the line ambiguous in that she could be asking the question of *B*, or she could be signaling to the audience that the voices have all been through this exercise of craving and remembering. The voices are trapped in a perpetual cycle of remembering, without ever really arriving at a coherent understanding of the traumatizing events. Yet it is a cycle that they ultimately feel responsible for. At one time or another all of the characters state: "I keep coming back" (177, 195,199). It is a repetitive cycle from which they are unable to extract themselves. It is "[t]he eternal return" (195). *A* rhetorically asks: "When does it stop" (172). The audience's role is to serve as witnesses for the repetitive trauma of these individuals and, in this manner, offer these characters the possibility of release from the pattern of repetitive memory. Within the artifice of this play there lies the hope of healing past wounds.

The cycle of traumatic memory and the cravings those memories inspire in this play bear the mark of ritual, another of Malkin's characteristics, of staged, almost cinematic effect and reenactment. "My life in black and white and reverse" (199), *B* says, almost as if bracing himself for a re-run performance. The staging of the play supports

the idea that this reenactment of memory is routine event for these voices. The audience is not seeing these characters realize, talk about and re-experience their pain for the first time. To the contrary, this routine is staged and choreographed. They sit in chairs, talk-show style, conscious of their audience and of being watched. In fact they need the audience in order to have voice, to be heard. As *A* says, it is a "horror so deep only ritual can contain it" (176). This performance is the ritual, the play the staging of the memory for an audience for the repetitive forum of their lived experience.

Postmodern theatre displays traits that complement the repetitiveness of traumatic memory with its emphasis on memory and the impossibility of narrative:

> One of the most distinguishing features of post-modern memory theatre is its overabundance of disconnected stimuli: conflicting discourses, intruding images, overlapping voices, hallucinatory fragments… The images often reach back into the pasts of a society, but their arrangement does not suggest a historical reconstruction; rather, chaotic memory-perhaps even traumatized memory seems to be at work. (Malkin 29)

Crave is theory in practice in regards to its exemplification of delayed trauma response, and its possession of disconnecting stimuli. As it seems that *C* is continually revisited by the physical sensation of the trauma, she also exhibits the effects of postmodern memory theory as outlined above. Following the intrusion of the memory of the "field. A basement. A bed. A car," instead of reconciling her understanding, an extreme response follows, triggered further by *A*'s line, "one touch" (175). Unable to reconcile the event within her psyche, she is destined to repeat the sensation of the trauma. She says: "Whenever I try to look really close at something, it swarms with white larvae" (175),

instead of affording her the ability to clarify her memory. The following chaotic memory, intrusive images and bodily reaction occurs: "My bowel curls at his touch…I feel nothing, nothing. I feel nothing…Maggots everywhere…I open my mouth and I too am full of them, crawling down my throat" (175), gagging her and physically stifling her ability to record or speak. It even seems that she is aware of this effect every time she tries to sort things out, despite her attempts to counter it: "I try to pull it out but it gets longer and longer, there's no end to it. I swallow it and pretend it isn't there" (175). It seems that the best she can do is repress the memory, and the result is a flood of images that are completely unrelated to the trauma itself but serve as a literalization of her inexpressible emotional experience. Disturbing images continue to manifest themselves for *C*: "A balloon of milk […] A bubble of blood […] Gurgling blood […] Thick yellow blood" (177). She is caught in a repetitive cycle of remembering and not remembering: "I keep coming back" (177). It is a cycle that approaches Freud's assimilation of traumatic memory but *C* falls short of actually making sense of the flood of emotions.

Crave can also be understood as an enactment of the belated impact of trauma as defined within a Freudian conception of the impact of trauma as used by Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*. I find this approach useful as a way to combat the play's resistance to interpretation. The manner in which Kane presents this aspect of traumatic memory corresponds to Freud's idea that the trauma is actually not situated in the originating event per se, "but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature--the way it was precisely not known in the first instance--returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). In other words, trauma "is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs" (5). It is "not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way

that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). It is something that "has been experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). In this way the unknowability and consequent inexpressibility of the psychological pain of trauma mirrors the key feature of physical pain. Its expressability is constricted to expression in literary language, "a language that defies even as it claims our understanding" (5). *C* experiences this effect. She is aware of feeling something but is not sure of what it is: "I have this guilt and I don't know why" (174). She remembers the trauma in fragments: "A field. A basement. A bed. A car" (174). She is revisited by the trauma repeatedly and these visitations are associated with a variety of cravings: "I crave white on white on black, but my thoughts race in glorious technicolour, prodding me awake, whipping away the warm blanket of invisibility every time it swears to smother my mind in nothing" (174). She returns to this site of trauma, desiring for the memory to become apparent, clarified in simple language; however, she is still unable to assimilate the trauma of sexual assault, as it continues to manifests itself to her. Furthermore, she is unable to express in language the "truth" of the matter. *C* buys "a new tape recorder and blank tapes" (174) in the hope that she might "record the truth" (174). Yet, she is again unsuccessful in her attempt to assimilate the trauma, for, even as she attempts to verbalize and assimilate it she relives the emotional recoil, experiencing it as if for the first time and consequently retreating to a state of preverbal helplessness.

The key to the failure of language in the face of traumatic experience is found precisely in the way in which the experience of trauma oscillates between knowing and not knowing. Because trauma, as Freud proposes, is an experience that is not fully

assimilated as it occurs, texts like Kane's seek to allow to surface or facilitate into knowledge the profound impact of the traumatic event. It is in this way that the inexpressibility of the pain of trauma is comparable to the inexpressibility of physical pain, for both are lacking a connection to an external referent or cause of pain. This is the location of the crisis in expression. *Crave* is like a traumatic event: we learn to know it by holding it at a distance.

Underneath the impact and memory of trauma there can be found a well of pain. The need for the verbal expression of pain seems to be a feature that coexists with the experience of traumatic memory, and is a central feature of this play. The sub-theme of the underlying pain of the trauma that remains, even when the trauma has ceased, needs to be explored. I draw upon Elaine Scarry's work on pain for that purpose in the following section.

The trauma that each of the characters has experienced is the catalyst for the play. The resulting pain is what each character desires to express, and presumably purge. The manner in which each character executes this exorcism is unique and individual to that character's needs and ability. Kane relies on language to convey the individual experiences of pain. As has already been noted, the way in which she uses language is cryptic, or fragmented, betraying a basic feature of pain--its essential inexpressibility. Nevertheless, and somewhat contradictorily, Scarry proposes the following: "Physical pain has no voice, but when it finds a voice, it begins to tell a story" (Scarry 3). According to Scarry, pain is a peculiar human experience for which there are limited and inadequate means of expressing something that belongs to an "invisible geography" (3). Not only does pain "resist language but [it] actively destroys it, bringing about an

immediate reversion to a state anterior to language"(4), a pre-linguistic state. In *Crave* each of the characters grapples with language's inadequate ability to convey his or her particular pain. Each act of speech is a more or less successful attempt to convey that which he or she feels. The voices' awareness of what they are trying to say is met with varying degrees of success, due to an inadequacy inherent in language's ability to express pain. As *B* says "there is a difference between articulacy and intelligence. I can't articulate the difference but there is one" (Kane 184).

Within the struggle with language lies the horrifying beauty of the play that carries the audience from the depths of subconscious screams and fragments to the expression of the most primal and pure of desires.

> To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself. (Scarry 6)

An example of the reversion to pre-language occurs when each of the characters in turn, let out with what is described in the stage directions as "*a short one syllable scream*" (Kane 186-87). The screams occur upon the heels of a series of a succession of no's and yes's, the first indication that the characters are losing the battle of expression, that the language is about to give way to the frustration of pain's basic inexpressibility. When *M* is finally able to speak again, the words are ironic and sarcastic, portraying the inability of the psychiatric profession's reliance on the talking cure to be able to measure, validate and alleviate pain. As *M* says, in ironic mockery of the psychologist: "If you won't talk, I

can't help you" (187). The birth of language, for the moment at least, is delayed. This statement in effect sums up the problem of communication: the inadequacy of language to express pain and the consequent inadequacy of others in being able to comprehend another person's pain. The physician's ability to diagnose and prescribe antidotes for pain is often dependant not only on the patient's ability to communicate the problem but also upon "the acuity with which he or she can hear the fragmentary language of pain, coax it into clarity, and interpret it" (Scarry 6). This skill is often complicated by the tendency for the physician to "not trust (hence, hear) the human voice, that they in effect perceive the human voice of the patient as an 'unreliable narrator' of bodily events, a voice which must be bypassed as quickly as possible so that they can get around and behind it to physical events themselves" (6). Frustration with the limitations of the medical profession is explored and expressed further by Kane in *4:48 Psychosis* which I analyze in the next chapter.

The possibility exists that what is perceived as an unwillingness to talk, is actually an inability to talk. Scarry claims that

> *Psychological* suffering, though often difficult for any one person to express, *does* have referential content, *is* susceptible to verbal objectification, and is so habitually depicted in art that [...] there is virtually no piece of literature that is *not* about suffering, no piece of literature that does not stand by ready to assist us. (11)

While it may be true that literature generally possesses a propensity toward explorations of psychological suffering (Scarry declines referring to it as psychological *pain*), I argue that it is not necessarily true that the expression of that type of pain or suffering is any

easier to achieve, or any more accurately described, through language than the type of physical pain upon which Scarry is focussed. As has been demonstrated by the inarticulate voices in *Crave*, psychological pain, often identifiable by its association with trauma, is for the most part nearly inexpressible. At the end of play, there is a sense that the characters are no closer to achieving an understanding and release from their difficulties than at the beginning, hence the repetitive nature of this experience. As *B* says, "Here I am once again, here I am, here I am, in the darkness, once again" (197). This idea is expressed again by the following sequence of lines:

A. At the end of the day it comes back to this

B. Gaining time

A. It comes back to me

M. But losing light

A. It comes back to this

C. Fat and shiny and dead dead serene

M. I can't save you (197-98)

Psychological pain, like bodily pain, is an interior state, invisible to the onlooker. It is arguably subject to the same types of doubt, the same misdiagnoses, as physical pain. Diagnosis is frequently sought and yet cannot even attempt to explain or express the experience. *M* lists her experience: "Impaired judgement, sexual dysfunction, anxiety, headaches, nervousness, sleeplessness, restlessness, nausea, diarrhea, itching, shaking, sweating, twitching" (187), a list of descriptors that are ultimately meaningless if they cannot lead to meaningful integration of the psychological pain, due to initial trauma.

Scarry makes the distinction between physical and psychological pain. She believes that physical pain has no referent outside of itself, whereas "interior states of consciousness are regularly accompanied by objects in the external world, that we do not simply 'have feelings' but have feelings *for* somebody or something, that love is love of *x*, fear is fear of *y*, ambivalence is ambivalence about *z*" (5). However, I think that Kane clearly demonstrates in *Crave* that interior psychological states do not always neatly correspond to a causal agent in the external world. The ability to name the referent of psychological distress is not always within the grasp of the person suffering. The failure of language to allow the person to name the referent *is* the reason for the person's suffering. At least that is the situation for the characters in *Crave*. If, and when, a person is able to name the referent of their distress they have reached a level of healing and a stage in recovery comparable to the moment in which a physician is accurately able to diagnose and prescribe treatment for physical pain. None of Kane's characters in *Crave* are afforded the luxury of being able to find remedies for their psychological pain. Their pain remains dissociated and fragmented. *C* is so dissociated from being able to name the referent of her distress that at one point, she questions the legitimacy of what she feels: "I am an emotional plagiarist, stealing other people's pain, subsuming it into my own" (195).

There is another type of pain that can be experienced by a person who is suffering from psychological pain, articulated by *C*: "I feel nothing, nothing. I feel nothing" (158). This psychological pain that is devoid of sensation obviously poses as much distress and is as indicative of as much pain as someone like the three voices that utter:

B. My back aches

C. My head aches

A. My heart aches (166)

At this moment, these voices know where they hurt. In *Crave*, physical pain is regularly connected to psychological processes. That is not to say that all pain is psychologically determined, but that the connection between mind and body, between the initial event of trauma and the mind's ability to make that event cognitively known, is necessary. In fact there is a suggestion throughout this play that non-specific or inexplicable physical pain often accompanies unnamable psychological distress. As further proof of this proposition I would like to draw attention to the following example from *Crave*:

A. Don't cut me out.

B. Something inside me that kicks like a bastard.

C. A dull ache in my solar plexus.

B. Gag for a fag.

M. Have you ever been hospitalized?

A. Pain by association.

C. I need a miracle to save me.

M. What for?

A. Insanity.

C. Anorexia. Bulimia.

B. Whatever

C. No.

M. Never.

C. Sorry.

A. The truth is simple.

C. I'm evil, I'm damaged, and no one can save me.

A. Death is an option.

B. I disgust myself.

C. Depression's inadequate. A full scale emotional collapse is the minimum required to justify letting everyone down (172-73).

Words like "cut," "kicks," "dull ache," and "gag" are typical descriptors associated with or used to describe physical pain and discomfort. According to Scarry, there are "two and only two metaphors" (15) that are used to describe pain, whether the context be medical, legal or literary. "The first specifies an external agent of the pain, a weapon that is pictured as producing the pain; and the second specifies bodily damage that is pictured as accompanying the pain" (15). The phrases tend to begin with either "it feels as if…; it feels as though" (15). Scarry refers to the first type of metaphor as a metaphor of agency and the second as a metaphor of damage. However, these metaphors do not have to be expressed with these exact prefaces. For example, in *Crave* the following line could just as easily be: "[It feels as if there is] something inside me that kicks like a bastard" (Kane 172). My argument is that metaphors that are more typically used to describe physical pain in this case are being used to relay the characters' psychological pain. The character is not literally being kicked on the inside by some third party force; however, a description of the psychological pain the character is experiencing is most clearly facilitated by the use of a physical analogy. Furthermore, the metaphors of pain that convey damage can also function as metaphors of psychological damage. For example, *C* acknowledges her damage when she states: "I'm evil, I'm damaged, and no one can save

me" (173). Later she is only able to name the perpetrator of her damage indirectly through fragmented, disconnected memories of place: "A field. A basement. A bed. A car" (174). The psychological damage that she experiences, presumably as a result of sexual assault, cause her bowel to "curl at his touch, " and to "feel nothing" (175). Finally it seems that once the psychological damage has been inflicted, it is permanent. As *C* says: "Nothing to be done," (182) and worse, it seems as though *C* has been entertaining the idea of suicide, but has arrived at an even worse conclusion: "You can only kill yourself if you're not already dead" (183). Clearly, metaphors of pain can function with equal effectiveness as descriptors of psychological pain and damage.

The passage in question initiates a portrayal of the duality of mind and body in pain, an oscillation between the metaphorical and the literal, by using the word "cut," which can refer to either the literal physical reality of severed flesh, or of surgical extraction, or to the metaphorical removal of one's presence from another's. In *Crave* there is this collective plea for and expression of the intertwined experience of mind and body. Further indication in *Crave* of the physical location of this psychological pain is a reference to the solar plexus. Two things are communicated by this seemingly cryptic passage: the first is that the pain is a "dull ache," indicating that the pain is temporally constant. Secondly, by referring to the solar plexus region, located just behind the stomach, it is suggested that the location of this constant pain is the very centre of the body, the very core of the speakers' being. The proximity of this pain, and its association with the stomach region is reinforced by the use of the word "gag," which suggests that the speakers' bodies are unable to take in anything and worse that they reject or expel that which the speakers put in. When one is gagged, one is gagged by something, which is

again a reference to something outside of the body, something foreign that has lodged itself inside, or is constricting the ability to breath and is inflicting pain and discomfort. The bodily process is operating on a literal and metaphorical level. Literally, the speaker's body is suffering from a disorder of material consumption, for example anorexia and bulimia, both of which describe a body that is both unwilling and unable to take in food, and furthermore, to sustain its own life. In this context they read as hollow labels for symptoms, a name for the pain or experience, but it is ultimately hollow discourse as there is an illness of much deeper origin in operation here than mere descriptives can illuminate.

Pain is reportedly experienced "by association," corroborating with the idea that pain is often experienced as a psychological entity. Furthermore, it suggests that pain, even psychologically induced pain, although an interior experience, is potentially contagious or transferable to another person. This is also another example of the metaphor of agency: that pain is caused by an association with *something* outside of oneself. When asked if the speaker has ever been hospitalized, there is the suggestion, by the line "Never," that the pain, the physical and psychological experience has perhaps eluded medical measurement. According to Scarry this is a common experience for people who suffer from pain; it is a phenomenon rooted in its basic "unsharability." "For the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to have 'certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is to 'have doubt'" (4). Consequently the suffering individual goes untreated and as a consequence, the "doubt of other persons [...] amplifies the suffering

of those already in pain" (7). The complainant's voice is plunged into a greater depth of suffering because added to the indescribable pain are insult and a loss of hope. This individual has been given the impression that he or she is untreatable, "damaged" because he or she does not fit into the medical paradigm. This is so because he or she has been unsuccessful in making the doctor understand, or perhaps because psychological disorders are just now beginning to be fully understood. And even worse, the character begins to believe that he or she is "evil" as a consequence of the way in which people with undiagnosed or untreated mental disorders have traditionally been marginalized, or labeled as morally inferior, threatening and therefore potentially dangerous to self and others: "I have a black black side I know. I have a side so green you will never know" (Kane 160). This "side" is even puzzling and threatening to the person possessing it.

The character believes himself to be unsalvageable, because he is un-diagnosable, and consequently untreatable. *B* sinks further into depression, helplessness and self-loathing: "I disgust myself" (173). According to *C* (the proximity of *C*'s statement seems to speak for *B*) the only solution is to draw attention to the problem by staging a "full scale emotional collapse." The need for recognition, or witnessing, for these individuals is paramount to their emotional and physical survival. This is the role in which the audience finds itself.

Hal Foster's argument regarding in *The Return of the Real* regarding trauma's prominent place in postmodern literature is useful here. In his discussion on repetition in Andy Warhol's paintings, Foster distinguishes between repetition and reproduction. Warhol said: "the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, the better and emptier you feel" (131). Much like Kroker's panic scenes that

liquidate desire, the repetition of these scenes also liquidates "significance," and acts like a defense "against affect" (131). Foster also points out that this corroborates Freud's understanding of repetition and its relationship to traumatic experience: One must "repeat a traumatic event (in actions, in dreams, in images) in order to integrate it into a psychic economy, a symbolic order" (131). Complicating this view, Foster argues that Freud's "restorative" aspect is not the result in Warhol's repetitive images, which are more like an "obsessive fixation" (132). Foster claims that "Warhol repetitions not only reproduce traumatic effects; they also produce them [...] several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic affect *and* a producing of it" (132). Lacan expands on the process of repetition by defining trauma as a "missed encounter with the real. As missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it must be repeated" (Foster 132). Arguably a similar process is at work in *Crave*.

In *Crave*, repetition is borne out in the revelation that the entire play is a repetition. Throughout the play various voices say variations upon: "I keep coming back" or "you keep coming back (175, 177, 191, 199), interspersed with words of encouragement for not returning to the site of repetition: "move on" (188, 189, 193, 194). Finally *M*, *B*, and *A* speak the following words: "Keep coming back"; "Again and again"; "The eternal return" (195). All of these instances support the theory that the play is an obsessive or ritualistic repetition of a traumatic memory that has yet to be integrated into everyday experience. The repetitions also point to the play's postmodern aesthetics as based in trauma, consistent with all of Kane's work to this point.

In my reading of *Crave*, I have sought to illuminate through close textual reading the major thematic aspects of the play, namely, that of the various types of cravings

individuals in crisis experience. As a play about craving and desire, Kane's work complicates a traditional theme by problematizing the cravings by depicting them as contradictory, dangerous and potentially destructive to both the individual that craves and the object of that desire. My discussion, in turn, focussed on the relationship of these cravings to memory. I have read *Crave* in a mode that emphasizes the interconnectedness of memory and trauma, in particular as a postmodern memory play, which bears the distinct features of fragmentation; disconnection and non-linearity. Of equal and parallel importance to these major thematic issues is the underlying theme of pain, and its relationship to the way in which the postmodern memory manifests itself on stage in a play of memory and thwarted desire. This play departs from Kane's earlier style of theatre in the way that she turns her focus almost exclusively to language rather than theatrical display. The emphasis on language reframes the traditional theme of thwarted desires, repositioning unrequited love as a theme that is in danger of becoming a cliché, as an urgent, postmodern concern that is bound up with the crisis of the individual's experience in the world. Arguably, the play is an exercise in what Malkin calls the re-negotiation of "traumas, oppressions, and exclusions of the past," which renders the disordered experience of the individual as valid and important. The result is that the play achieves freedom from the conventional constrictions of a bounded and orderly narrative that values a constructed, linear experience. In *Crave*, Kane portrays the individual's quest to integrate a traumatic and disorderly present more accurately as an experience of the confusion of trauma, memory and desire according to postmodern sensibilities.

Chapter Five

4:48 Psychosis

> The body is the inscribed surface of events, traced by language and dissolved by ideas, the locus of a dissociated self, adopting the illusion of a substantial unity--a volume in disintegration. (Michel Foucault "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* 83)

Kane's final offering to the theatrical world, *4:48 Psychosis*, is a testimony to the veracity of Kane's self-professed growing interest in the performative potential of theatre. In an interview dating back to 1995 Kane stated that: "Increasingly, I'm finding performance more interesting than acting, theatre more compelling than plays" (Kane "Drama"). Kane's interest in theatre's untapped potential is evident in the way her final play pushes the conventional boundaries of playwriting. *4:48 Psychosis* reads less like a play than a prose poem intended for interpretative performance. I read *4:48 Psychosis* as Kane's a theatrical journey into the darkest realms of the human psyche exploring feelings of alienation, depression, and suicide. It is also a play about unrequited love. In this chapter, I discuss the way in which Kane conjoins the violent language she perfected in her earlier work, her interest in memory, the trauma that is evident in all of her plays, and the desire to provide the audience with experiential theatre. I consider *4:48 Psychosis* as a work of art that is a theatrical enactment of depression and suicide, within which is the expression of the fragmented postmodern subject and the impossibility of presenting an individual as a unified whole, as a cohesive logical unit. As a dramatic technique, Kane invokes biblical language; her use of this language, as a way of communicating, will also be examined. Kristeva's theory of the abject and its significance to Kane's

abject figure is included. In discussing the visual presentation of the original production of *4:48 Psychosis*, I draw upon theories of Cubist art and modernism as a means of discussing the play's inherent aesthetic tendencies, and demonstrate how in spite of the presence of these features, the play is ultimately postmodern.

Because of the reputation Sarah Kane gained with her professional debut in January of 1995 with *Blasted*, also performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, it seemed as if the theatre savvy, and theatre voyeurs alike, waited with bated breath to experience this final offering from Britain's recently deceased *enfant terrible*. A history of mixed and emotional reviews succeeded in making Kane a well-known and controversial writer; however, Kane's fourth play, *Crave*, converted several of her former critics into fans when she presented a play that departed from her signature blood and gore style of theatre. As with *Crave*, in *4:48 Psychosis,* Kane relies upon her poetic sensibility and a complete absence of the visual blood and graphic gore of her early plays, while maintaining an emotionally and intellectually challenging play. *4:48 Psychosis* is built upon the stylistic foundations of *Crave*, yet retains all of the raw writing style and emotional and provocative impact of her earlier, more controversial plays.

4:48 Psychosis is a difficult play for which to provide a synopsis; it would be easier to say what it is not. However, this is not to imply that the play is lacking content or meaning. The play is about a consciousness, possibly one or more depending on how one chooses to cast the play. The consciousness is being treated for depression, ostensibly he or she falls in love with his/her therapist, is rejected and retreats further into depression and suicidal despair. It is not solely a play about unrequited love, and more specifically suicide, although the temptation to read it as such is there, due to the

circumstances surrounding Kane's own suicide. Due to the temporal proximity of Kane's suicide to her completion of this play many have argued, and will likely continue to argue, that this play is an elaborate and complicated suicide note. However, I would like to invoke postmodern ambiguity surrounding authorship and authority and propose that something akin to Foucault's proposition in "What is an Author" is required in order to release the author from the play. In his essay, Foucault addresses the "author function" and concludes with his famous proclamation of the "death of the author" (117). Foucault is defining one of the foundational principles of the "writing of our day" (116) in which a new understanding of signs reigns, where a shift in focus has taken place. It no longer matters who is speaking; the production of speech, of writing prevails:

> The essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears. (116)

Rather than witnessing romantic "exalted emotions," which in the case of *4:48 Psychosis* entail more specifically the anticipation of the privileged reception of a message from author to audience, the play is a game of mirrors (quite literally in its premiere production) that promises to reveal the author, but instead reveals psychological process and an erasure of subjectivity and authority. Therefore, I am resisting a reading that necessitates a relationship between play and author's life and death.

Hence, it is more productively understood as a play about the process and medicalization of modern, urban alienation and the institutional murder of citizens who do not fit into the status quo. Through the sparse scenes and emotional

mono/dia/trio/logues Kane dares, with poetic sleight of hand, to pull the authoritative pedestal from beneath the psychiatric profession. Using theatrical conventions and poetic speech Kane draws attention to modern conceptions of mental illness. Kane asks whether another prescription is what is really needed. In the following lines from the play Kane summarizes and dramatizes her disillusionment with the psychiatric profession's ability to fulfil its patients' needs:

> [Doctor]. You don't need a friend you need a doctor.
>
> [Patient]. You are so wrong. (35) [1]

These lines are also indicative of the sentiment of alienation, or a desire for meaningful human contact and a salve for the unbearable loneliness this voice suffers.

The play is sparsely written, along the lines of *Crave*, but with even less formal structure; in *4:48 Psychosis* Kane dispenses with the convention of designating various lines as belonging to a particular voice. The script does not contain any instructions from the playwright as to how many people should be cast, or what gender they should be. Nor does the script designate any scene breaks, set descriptions, or stage directions.[2] The play is presented in the script, and is most accurately described as a long, theatrical poem, for which premiere production, director James MacDonald chose to cast three actors, two female and one male. Also in the original production, Kane's play was presented in one act, lasting approximately one hour in length.

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[1] For clarity I have designated these lines as belonging to the voice of a doctor and his/her patient. This character designation is not indicated in the script; however, this is the way that these lines were staged in the 2000 production.

[2] There is one exception to this statement: one stage direction is found at the very beginning of the play indicating a long silence.

The theme of unrequited love, carried over from Kane's previous play *Crave*, is prominent but it is important to note that the failure of this love should not be understood as the sole driving force behind the suicide. It is another symptom of the alienation that the consciousness in this play suffers, which is arguably a symptom of the engulfing, depressive state in which this individual is entrapped. One voice expresses frustration in trying to learn to live with another human, and trying to understand why the relationship failed, why relationships have to be so hard: " I've never in my life had a problem giving another person what they want. But no one's ever been able to do that for me. No one touches me, no one gets near me. But now you've touched me somewhere so fucking deep I can't believe and I can't be with you. Because I can't find you" (215). The relationship is the microcosmic example of the urban landscape. This person, the object of this consciousness' desire, cannot be found, because the world is such that someone can simply disappear should they desire it. Within the play, the prevailing sentiment is that there is a diminished sense of responsibility toward other humans; the bond that is supposed to form between people is lacking. The line, quoted above, indicates a very cynical view of love, relationships and the world in general. It suggests a view of the world as a greedy and emotionally disconnected place.

I had an opportunity to attend the premiere production of *4:48 Psychosis* in London, in June/July 2000, at The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. The production was sparse, consisting most memorably of a large mirror hung at a forty-five degree angle above the stage, a table, a chair and three actors. The colours were sombre, and the lighting entailed a mixture of high-tech video projection and natural light. Actors (bodies) occupied space in such a way as to complicate surface and plane by using the mirror as

an opportunity to add another dimension to the playing area. The visual representation of this production inspired me to make comparisons with Cubist objectives of artistic representation. It is well known that Cubist forms of painting and collage create the effect of presenting multiple points of view of an object, of rendering space in defiance of conventional methods of horizon and perspective in painting. In Cubism, there is a desire to present the subject in its entirety, in its full dimensionality. Not only is the viewer requested to consider the face of the object, but also the sides and back, simultaneously. Within that tradition, a portrait is no longer simply a rendering of the likeness of a person, but rather an attempt to present the person in her entirety, and more importantly from a variety of perspectives, flaunting rather than concealing contradictions and inconsistencies. This chapter will use the comparison of the production's visual aesthetics to Cubist and modernist art to springboard a literary analysis of Kane's final play.[3] I do not know whether the similarities with Cubism were intentional or that the director was particularly inspired to present the piece in this manner. Perhaps the fractured structure of the play lends itself most dramatically to the visual effects invented by Cubist artists, in turn facilitating a contemporary portrayal of the type of psychological alienation with which Kane's play grapples.

Despite the play's visual affinity with Cubist artistic renderings which display surfaces as multiple, incongruous and fractured, and the body as violently segmented, *4:48 Psychosis* is ultimately not a Cubist or, for that matter, modernist play. Its

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[3] Cubism is generally understood to have developed circa 1909-1912 as a result of artistic experimentation by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Cubism features a "new kind of pictorial space to which the misleading term Cubism was applied before its character and implications were understood" (Hamilton 208). Cubist space cannot be "analysed or described in terms of either two-dimensional pattern or three-dimensional perspective" (208).

postmodernism can be detected in the unwillingness to entertain even the possibility of a reassembly of the fractured pieces. Jameson's provocative statement in relation to the impact of American modes of economic and military practice have had on global postmodern culture, that in this case the invisible, yet presiding "underside of culture is blood, torture, death, terror" (5), describes the underlying aesthetic sentiment of the play, and impetus for the psychological terror that the characters, or voices in the play experience. Rather than representing a radical rupture from her previous plays, the nascent and burgeoning violence and its connection to postmodernism persuasively connect this play to her others. Ultimately, Kane uses the visual aesthetics of Cubism, inadvertently exposes the lie of modernism, and refuses to indulge in modernist nostalgias. There is no moment of dramatic reassembly or potential for healing in Kane's play. Instead, as in other of her plays, there is nihilism. I now offer a comparison to Cubist forms. A discussion surrounding the play's nihilism follows later.

Cubist artists, such as Picasso and Braque, were driven to discover a way in which to depict not simply objects in space, but rather "the space they engender" (Hamilton 208). Cubism is notable for "portions of the compositions that remain unsolved, in the spatially inexplicable situations where planes dissolve and interpenetrate, or come together in configurations which Guillaume Apollinaire [...] described as 'new structures [painted from] elements borrowed not from visual reality, but from the reality of intellectual knowledge'" (212). Likewise, portions of Kane's play remain unsolvable. In *4:48 Psychosis*, Kane creates a new form of drama and dramatic language which uses the theatrical space in a different way.

The language of Kane's script itself necessitates a visual production that is conscious of space for the play's language is also reflexively aware of the space it occupies. For example, a line's proximity to the speech that precedes and follows it can alter and compound not only the contextual meaning of the line, but also the semantic meaning. Furthermore, this is a play that seeks not simply to portray the anguish of mental illness, not what it is *like*, as a piece of realist art seeks to achieve a likeness of the portrayed object, but, rather to enact what it *is* to suffer mental illness with the full awareness that one is suffering from it. This play is not a simile or extended metaphor of suicidal depression; it is the enactment of it. As such, the production featured the play as a series of spaces, contentiously oscillating between the interior and exterior space of consciousness, occupied by actors, arranged on stage to refract the space onto two planes: that of the stage and within the mirror. Arguably, for the purposes of this play the playing space becomes the landscape of depression, in which the positive and negative space, hold an equivalent value.

I argue that Kane's play requires comparison with the Cubist period in art not only because of the very specific visual aspects of Cubist invention, and with the modernist preoccupations with language that it shares, but also because of the play's atmosphere of alienation. In modernism this alienation is explained as the result of "an industrial society whose inhumanity repels" (Mack 1363) artists and writers alike. The Expressionist aspect of modernism sought to "subordinate conventional (rational) style and let emotion dictate the structure of their works, emphasizing rhythm, disrupted narrative line and broken syntax, and distorted imagery" (1363), all features which Kane's play exhibits, or perhaps postmodernly consumes and recycles. *4:48 Psychosis*

might not be a direct reaction to industrialism, or a deliberate re-working of modernist aesthetic ideals; however, it is a reaction to her own generation's attempt to reject a mode of existence that has become intolerable. It is an existence that is rife with the accumulated effect of diminished humanity. Furthermore, once the significance of alienation within the play has been established, it is important to the read the play within the context of its own postmodern landscape and stylings, even if that landscape contains the recycled/regurgitated word-play of earlier forms of experimental drama.

I believe that Kane's generation has a lot to be angry about in Great Britain. Her generation was raised with the anger and violence of a nation that invented--perfected--the militant politicism of punk rock and other anti-establishment cultural articulations. Kane's generation experiences the grim destiny of a generation that, as a whole, has little to look forward to other than a lifetime of living on social assistance, of living in poverty within an inflated economy, and of feeling displaced in a culture that unashamedly supports rigid class structures and privileges an elite economic minority. In *4:48 Psychosis*, one of the voices expresses the fear that she will be an "old lady living on the street forgetting [her] name" (Kane 218); this is the fearsome reality much of Britain faces. Kane's is a generation that has learned that there is little chance of finding peace and harmony. If anything, contemporary youth culture, as evidenced by much of the subject matter of Kane's and her contemporaries' art, is a culture steeped in violence, disassociation from the comfort of traditional values, and stark alienation from a consumer and consumption driven and oriented society. As early as 1985, British playwright Wallace Shawn, associated with the Royal Court Theatre, commented on his society's condition: "'The playwrights of my generation have a very strong sense that the

society we live in is insane, that there is something very, very wrong…'" (Ravenhill, Preface 5). Ten years later there is a continuation of this sense of a society gone mad in Kane's work and that of others; this statement summarizes the urgency that contemporary playwrights must experience that has driven them to capture and somehow communicate and draw attention to this problem. The fragments of modernism that can be detected in Kane's work are aesthetic, perhaps even a postmodern borrowing of an aesthetic technique, fragmentation of language and dispensation with formal structure for instance, that facilitates expression of the kind of alienation that Kane desired to stage. However, what makes this play postmodern, despite its modernist features is that no solution is offered. In its presentation, society is not reassembled into a more sensible and sensitive whole; rather, these issues are presented in fragments and are deconstructed further in the process of the play.[4] At the end of this play, the result of modern fragmentation is complete annihilation in suicide. There is a cynicism that can be detected in Kane's work in general and, as an artistic conclusion to an oeuvre, *4:48 Psychosis* demonstrates that the possibility of reassembly is something that cannot be counted on. The brutality of the language, the depressive state of the play and its lack of closure are an indication of the playwright's belief that society has in fact been reduced to the gratuitous and consumeristic behaviours of, in the momentarily famous words of Mark Ravenhill, "Shopping and Fucking."

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[4] T.S Eliot also dealt with the modern experience of fragmentation and alienation in "The Waste Land" in 1922. The entire poem is infused with images of death, mythical and otherwise, culminating in a haunting vision of decay and ruin Eliot's repetition of the conventional bar-keeps' phrase "Hurry up please it's time" (2794-5) also serves to impress upon the reader the urgent manner in which time is passing and pulling life along, that life must hurry, because time is of the essence. Furthermore, the theme of suicide is subtly introduced in the line "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night" (2795).

When I attended the premiere production of *4:48 Psychosis*, I observed that the play's process of alienation began upon entering the Royal Court's Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. The playing space is located several flights of stairs above the Royal Court's main stage and foyer. The entire Royal Court Theatre building, recently renovated, is a postmodern mixture of modern steel and glass with the original Edwardian brick and neo-classical architecture. The Jerwood Theatre itself is an intimate, second playing space, secluded, and accommodating approximately seventy people, on unnumbered, back-less, bench style seating. It is a black box playing space that lends itself perfectly for theatre that is considered "experimental." At the end of the journey upstairs, audience members are moved spatially farther and farther from the Royal Court's main-stage production area, and metaphorically farther away from main stage production values and expectations.

For this particular production, upon entering the playing space, the audience was greeted with very little lighting and complete silence. House lights were dimmed very low, so that it was difficult to see until my eyes became adjusted to the light. There wasn't any pre-performance music. Perhaps because the theatre space was silent, the audience also maintained a self-conscious silence; every move made and sound uttered filled the space and reinforced the effect of the silence. This silence continued and was heightened once the three characters entered the playing space, as per Kane's opening and rare (in this play) stage direction: "*A very long silence*" (205). It was long indeed, lasting approximately 5 minutes, a veritable eternity during performance, before the first words were spoken.

The set design, by Jeremy Herbert, was deceptively simple, with a perfectly stark white floor. As mention already, a mirror almost the same size as the white floor hung at a forty-five degree angle over the stage reflecting the set that consisted of two chairs and a table. The characters were dressed in neutral colours, and casual contemporary, unisex clothing. The sparse atmosphere created by keeping the use of properties to a minimum worked to suggest the atmosphere of an institution such as a psychiatric clinic. It also suggested the aesthetic atmospheric ideals of modern art: clean lines, sombre colours, positive and negative space carrying equal value. However, MacDonald's production was not afraid of incorporating modern technology that might be considered postmodern in its use in live theatre production. At various points throughout the play video projections of a view from a window and a street scene of people walking were projected either on the table-top, or across the floor. At certain points near the end of the play visual static as from a television channel that has signed off of the air, was projected upon the floor. Another theatrical trick, which serves to challenge the boundaries of conventional theatrical space, occurs when the characters open real windows to let in real light and real street sounds from the nearby Sloane Square.

My description and discussion to this point have been purposefully brief. My intention is to examine each of these production aspects I have described in light of their connection to Cubist art. In reading Christine Poggi's *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage*, I was struck by a particular turn of phrase Poggi uses to describe the impetus for the creation of what has come to be known as Cubist and Futurist art. She pinpoints a "sense of *inquiétude* toward the norms of painting that inspired the many inventions of the Cubists and Futurists" (Poggi ix). What Poggi refers

to concerns not only the artistic impetus, but also the visual effect of the painting upon the viewer, the way in which the painter has chosen to represent the subject in order to elicit an emotional response from the viewer, a response of *inquiétude*. I cannot help but feel that that same sentence could be applied to Kane's; "painting" is replaced with "theatrical representation." *Inquiétude* suggests a restlessness, uneasiness, and anxiety. As applied to the theatre it suggests the inability to remain silent. As one passes through Kane's dramatic oeuvre, there is a growing sense of disquietude, beginning first with the "in-yer-face" violence and gore of her first plays, and culminating in the long silences and sense of finality that is *4:48 Psychosis*. While *inquiétude* facilitates a description of the emotional atmosphere of the artistic work, it does not explain its origin, or elucidate meaning. The question is begged: From where does this uneasiness, this anxiety, originate? What is it that inspired artists at the turn of the nineteenth century toward these forms of expression, and why are these forms of expression appearing again at the end of the twentieth century?

By way of attempting to answer the questions posed above I offer the following explanation. During my trip to London to see the play, I tried to pay particular attention to the atmosphere of the city. I attempted to capture the cultural moment of this production in the hopes of detecting even a glimmer of the sort of anxiety and alienation that could possibly be the source of the *inquiétude*. Traditional catch phrases such as "Rule Britannia," and the pun "Cool Britannia," often sprang to mind. A particular advertisement which was prevalent on the city's billboards that summer caught my attention: a sinister depiction of a prisoner, drawn in a cartoon style, in the midst of being stretched and tortured on a rack (it was an advertisement for the London Dungeon Tourist

Attraction). The caption read "Welcome to Cruel Britannia." Those two words, "Cruel Britannia" seemed to summarize for me the cultural legacy of an aspect of British culture that may be partially responsible for necessitating the creation of certain works of art, old and new, like Kane's latest play, and is responsible for the disquieting attitude of much of the "in-yer-face" theatre of the 1990's. This *inquiétude* is the result of what it means to exist within "Cruel Britannia."

Even while acknowledging that the intention of the poster and the attraction of the London Dungeon itself is that of good spirited fun of the blood and gore variety, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the dungeon was, historically, a very real dungeon and prison where innumerable acts of injustice and torture were performed, all in the name of God and King or Queen. Having acknowledged that, it is also hard to miss the fact that the caricature of the man on the poster is reminiscent (whether by accident or design) of renderings from paintings of the likes of turn of the nineteenth-century painters: Goya (from an earlier century's turn), Munch and Picasso. The haunted expression, wide eyes, frenetic drawing style, and the traumatic depiction of humanity at its most fragile and of humanity coming face to face with "knowledge" are all common features of works from this era. If there is a true similarity, a connection between this production of Kane's work, and the sentiment contained within these modernist paintings, and if the connection is greater than simply a similarity in appearance, then it might be found in an awareness, and the depiction of this awareness, even if on a subliminal level. If anything, the poster served as a symbol of a culture of violence, or at the very least a culture preoccupied with violence, which for me is proof that Kane's plays, and others', are reacting to a cultural trend which is contemporary as opposed to merely historical. It is no longer satisfactory

to speak of Britain's violent, imperial presence in the past tense, as a historical blunder, because Britain's present reality is arguably as violent and oppressive as it always has been.

Thus far I have attempted to lay the groundwork in order to make a connection amoung a particular artistic movement (modernism and Cubism), a contemporary attitude (Cool Britannia), a marketing spin on a traditional phrase (Cruel Britannia), some very real social issues concerning violence and mental illness, and the recent production of Kane's play. I will now delve more deeply into just how these seemingly disparate topics are in fact related. In order to establish a firm connection amoung these aspects, I will examine the features of MacDonald's production and Kane's play that I believe are held in common with the aims of Cubist artists. I will draw upon Poggi's introduction to the Cubist invention of collage and others as sources for some of the pertinent characteristics and theories surrounding this art form.

The term Cubism can be broadly applied to both the visual and literary arts, seeing that both groups were largely represented within that movement in Paris in the early part of the century. In fact, it is often difficult to differentiate between the two groups because of the way in which the two artistic forms tend to intersect within this movement. Take Guillaume Appollinaire's statement: "'I too am a painter'" (Bruenig xxvi), which proclaims the proximal sameness of the two arts during this time period. Visual artists incorporated the written word, excerpts and poems in their entirety into their paintings and collages. Likewise, poets were visually reshaping their poems, using "typographical innovations" and "geometrical shapes in the verbal imagery" (xxvii). In addition to breaching disciplinary boundaries, Cubist artists had other compositional

concerns. Perhaps the most broad and yet most concise description of Cubist painting is Picasso's statement of it being "a sum of destructions" (qtd in Poggi xxiv). The idea that Cubist art consists of "images and statements, presented in a seemingly disordered but considered fashion, so that they build a coherent work," which "breaks down the elements of an experience in order to create a new synthesis and so represent it more truly"(xxiii-xxiv). This statement could apply to Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* and the manner in which Kane's play appears to be a random, disordered presentation of depression and suicide. Thus, I am reading *4:48 Psychosis* as a dramatic dissection of a mental and emotional breakdown ending in suicide presented not as an allegory or narrative of what it is *like*, but more as being more closely along the lines of Cubist notions of how to present reality as the fragmented and chaotic experience itself: raw, confusing and unresolved. This is not a narrative that attempts to relate the experience of trauma. It is trauma in *media res*.

When Poggi describes Cubist collage as "undermin[ing] traditional notions of material and stylistic unity" (xi), I equate these notions with those of dramatic unity. In examining the way in which Kane's play undermines dramatic unities of time, place and action, I argue that Kane's play is for the most part in direct violation of these principles. There is a complete absence in the unity of time, although the play, in a roundabout way, moves toward the moment of suicide. However, simply because the play arrives at a definitive point does not mean that it arrived there in a logical, straight-forward manner. In actuality, the final moment, the point in time in which the suicide presumably takes place, 4:48 am, is the only truly recognizable marker of time in the play. In *4:48 Psychosis* time has been dissolved to give way to an emotional experience that stands

outside of the usual awareness or marking of time. What happens during this play, happens outside of the necessity of time.

The time of day referred to in the title, 4:48, as a reference to a specific time, in a play in which time operates under different chronological rules, requires analysis. Early in the play, 4:48 is referred to as a time "when desperation visits"; it is a time chosen for the act of suicide, a time when the character plans to "hang [him/her]self" and yet the character does "not want to die" (Kane 207). Later, a character flatly states, "After 4:48 I shall not speak again" (213). Much later in the play 4:48 is referred to in complete opposition to the first instance. Instead of bringing desperation, the hour is understood as a time in which, "sanity visits [...] for one hour and twelve minutes I am in my right mind. When it has passed I shall be gone again, a fragmented puppet, a grotesque fool" (229). "Fragmented" because the speaker is a dis-unified subject, and a "puppet" because he/she is controlled by outside forces. 4:48 is also the time at which the character "shall sleep" (233). Finally it is the hour of "a solo symphony [...] at 4:48 [...] the happy hour [...] when clarity visits" (242). This is the final 4:48, the moment the character has killed him or herself; the final moments of the play are the dying moments of this life. The title has been said, by press releases at the time of production, to refer to "the time of morning when the urge to kill oneself is at its highest" (Hattenstone 34). I have been unable to determine whether there is any documented validity from psychiatric research to this statement. There is a suggestion, in some of the lines cited from the play that this character has survived the passing of many 4:48s. The repetitiveness of the motif indicates that there is an awareness that one of them will be the final hour. I say "awareness" instead of suggesting that it is a decision based on one of lines: "You have

no choice…the choice comes after" (230). The act of suicide for this person is outside of voluntary control. It is not fully intended: "I do not want to die" (207). This sentiment is repeated elsewhere when the character shouts at the audience, "DON'T LET THIS KILL ME," and refers to the desire to commit suicide as a "sub-intentional death" (226). Even after it is made clear by the line, "It is done" (242), that the suicide was successful, the remains of the character, or consciousness, indicate that this was not the way he or she wished for things to end: "I have no desire for death…no suicide ever did" (244). While within the play time functions almost as a character, it also works as the antithesis of character, working against the character's struggle to remain alive.

According to Roland Barthes, "Repetition affords access, in effect, to a different temporality, which also abolishes the pathos of time which is usually linked to birth, life and death" (234). Furthermore, the repetition can be understood as "another conception of the human subject" (234). Certainly, the repetitions are significant in that they not only suggest that the human subject in question has been caught in a circular loop, an unproductive logic that desires and does not desire self-destruction, but that the repetition itself is a symptom of trauma. To me this is another sign of the playwright's belief, echoing Jameson, in an "alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with and history" (Jameson "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 117). In *4:48 Psychosis* there are numerous repetitions, none more stunning and memorable than the 100-fold repetition, in varying order of "flash flicker slash burn wring press dab slash punch" (231-32), an example of repetitive verbal violence enacted not only within the figure, but upon the audience by way of its extended repetition and mysterious meaning.

There is also a repetitiveness to some of the lines, which creates the effect of the play's temporality backtracking, repeating itself, or of being stuck at a particular moment in memory, or emotional experience. It is a point to which the character continues to return because there is nowhere else to go. For example, the line "Hatch opens stark light" (Kane 225) is repeated five times throughout the play. It is a cryptic line in that its reference is never made explicit to the audience, and its meaning is not self-evident. Does it refer to a vision of a spacecraft, or some sort of vehicle, perhaps for transporting the dead, the suicides to an afterlife, or, is it the hallucination of a psychotic episode or paranoid delusion? It is a vision that, in the play, appears to precipitate the act of suicide for this person. After the fourth repetition, this line follows: "the rupture begins" (241). This marks the beginning of the end. There is finality to the line, a rupture with life, and end to existence as it had been. The decision is irreversible at this point; the act of suicide has already been put into motion. As this voice says, he or she has taken "[o]ne hundred Lofepramine, forty five Zopiclone, twenty five Temazapam, and twenty Melleril […] Everything I had […] Swallowed […] Slit […] Hung […] It is done" (241-42). Rather than enact the suicide graphically, Kane stages the process as a death in and through language. The play's final lines race toward the moment of absolute death. The final line, "please open the curtains" (245), sounds almost like a stage direction, the distinction between act(ion) and performance having been blurred. It is a signal to the audience that the moment is over, that they can leave now. They are no longer necessary as witnesses to this event.

The technique of altering dramatic unity is neither peculiar to Kane nor entirely innovative. Thus the question is raised concerning the purpose of undermining dramatic

unity: How and more importantly, why does one seek to achieve this purpose? When the word "undermine" is used, it should signify a process of destablization, a weakening or wearing away of the foundation from below. Kane's play undermines so completely the practice of dramatic unity that the notion that it is even possible to present a narrative as a unified, unidirectional whole is subverted. In regard to temporal unity it is impossible to declare the time frame within which the play takes place. The events, the scenes that are identifiable as lived experience, could have occurred over several years, or within a few short months, days, hours or minutes. Any conclusions are arrived at by assumptions that exist outside of the play itself. Working against an adherence to linear time, Kane has achieved the theatrical effect of collapsing the important, the definitive moments of the character's life into what feels, from the perspective of the audience, like an instance, the minuscule moment when one's life passes before one's eyes. The effect of time as collapse results in the portrayal of a chaotic, uncontrollable flood of emotions, memories and sensations, something like what it must actually feel like when one has set in motion the plans for suicide. Kane captures the moment succinctly, and at the top of the play she writes: "a shaft of light enters as all thoughts unite in an instant of accord" (Kane 205). That "instant of accord," the moment of the play in which one moves from alive and suffering, to death, is essentially the duration of the play. Kane's undermining of temporal unity is almost a direct application of Picasso's idea of Cubist art being a "sum of destructions." Kane's play is the linguistic equivalent of the effect of cutting up all the events of a person's life into small fragments, some of which have been selected and pasted together, to present a representative, explanatory sum, a simulacra of the experience of the trauma that necessitated the suicide.

Aristotle claimed that

> a plot doesn't get to be unified, as some people think, (simply) by being about one person: a lot of things--an infinite number of things--happen to one person, and a good number of these things have nothing to do with a single (action (*praxis*)); and in the same way, there are many of one person's actions from which no single unified action arises. (Aristotle 79)

Accordingly, a play possesses unity of action if

> Just as in the other mimetic (arts) the unified *mimesis* is… of a single thing, so also the (tragic) plot, being a *mimesis* of action, (must) also be (a *mimesis*) of an action (that is) unified and whole in itself, and the constituent events (must) be so put together that if one of them is shifted or taken away, the whole (structure) is disrupted and thrown out of kilter. For a part that clearly does nothing by being present or left out is no *part* of the whole. (81)

Aristotle's approach would proclaim Kane's play as episodic and disunited, in effect, a colossal failure. Scenes follow one on top of the other, without closure or appropriate segues. Scenes are only sometimes demarcated in the script by the presence of a series of dashes. Voices blend and compete. At times, it seems as if there is only one character speaking, and then suddenly it becomes apparent that there is a conversation in progress. Characters speak in fragmented sentences, often uttering single words, in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. For Kane, meaningful, predictable cause-effect sequencing of events or a unified subject who is able to interpret them are unnecessary for

accomplishing emotional effect. Yet, despite the play's seeming lack of coherence, its intention is clear. It has been demonstrated by a variety of playwrights through the centuries that strict adherence to the concept of unity of action is not necessary in order to create effective drama. By joining a rebellious tradition against conventional plot structures, Kane has achieved a representation of the fragmentation of the mind in the throes of mental anguish and suicidal conditions. There is a total lack of unity in the Aristotelean sense and yet, in Kane's particular use of this fragmented style of presentation, there is a peculiar unity that applies to, and is appropriate for, the anguish and alienation that is being portrayed. Kane's portrayal of mental anguish might not have been achieved as effectively if she had opted for a conventional style of plot construction. A study of suicide runs the danger of being clichéd, and worse, of romanticizing the act. Amongst the chaos of a plot composed of destructions and fragments of experience, a poetic pattern emerges, and it is not the saccharine romantic poetry of a depressed lover. Instead Kane's play is the complicated poetry of a fragmented consciousness in its final moments.

Kane uses place and setting in much the same violationary way as she uses time. At one moment conversation might be located in a psychiatrist's office, the next in the bed of the character, or possibly even as internal dialogue, externally produced. The location is apparent because of production choices and directorial decisions, not necessarily because of the script. "Place" in the production emanates from "space" in the script, the playing space of the experience of the trauma. Kane's use of space is as ephemeral as her use of time. Working against the foundation of unity of place, Kane has succeeded in collapsing the spatial experience of the characters into what is understood as

the essential self. The place of the play, dislocated as it is from conventional referentiality, is an intimate setting, possibly an interior setting found in the deepest corners of the psyche. As a voice from the play says: "a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banqueting hall near the ceiling of a mind whose floor shifts as ten thousand cockroaches" (Kane 206). In positioning her play in this manner, Kane manages to collapse space and time into one unit of experience, presenting the moment as existence. The events of the play take place outside of the ordinary time/space continuum of life, and yet they represent events that occurred within the regular space/time continuum of ordinary existence. In the instance of the experience of trauma, the exact origin of the experience recedes as the trauma becomes pervasive and systemic.

In the Royal Court's production, the director conflates space through lighting changes, the arrangement of the table and chairs on stage, and the division of the play's text between actors. A doctor's office is often represented by the shadow of windowpanes cast upon a character and the projection of street scenes on the table. Scenes most reminiscent of the visual aspect of Cubist art are to be found in the topsy-turvy use of space in this play. For example, the visual perspective of the dialogue between what has been constructed in the production as the patient and doctor is skewed by the visual effect of the aforementioned window pane and street scene. View and window are dislocated. The street scene, which in ordinary reality would be viewed through the window, is projected upon the table, which serves as the doctor's desk. The panes belonging to the window are projected upon the patient. The whole effect is further skewed through its duplication in the mirror above the stage, which adds yet another dimension of fragmentation and disorientation. In a scene in which one of the characters has cut

himself, another example of the disruption of place occurs when the patient holds out his arm for the doctor to examine the cut and the audience discovers that the patient has carved the words "Yes/No" upon it. However, the audience reads the message in mirror image upon the arm; it appears legibly in the mirror. The effect is disorienting and plays upon the audience's ability to shift its focus between stage space and mirror space in order to experience the totality of the scene enacted upon the stage. It also forces the audience to consider the veracity of what they see before them: What is real, and what is a projection of reality? The appearance of the "Yes/No" on the inside of one of the characters' arms is not indicated in the script and can only be presumed to be the addition of the director.[5]

Furthermore, the inscription, or rather the carving of text onto the body is suggestive of other things. As mentioned earlier, Jameson suggested that the body inscribes the undersides of culture and the undersides of culture inscribe the body. Here, the body becomes the text constituted by a self-inflicted violence that reads as indecisiveness (Yes/No). The juxtaposition of the affirmative and the negative cancel each other. The result is the body as demarcated site of violence, and unlike Kane's earlier plays in which violence is inflicted between people, this is self-inflicted.

This play departs from Cubism and modernism in general in that the disassembly of the consciousness does not reassemble itself. In Cubist art, despite the fragmentation and "destruction," a cohesive whole can be detected. This does not happen in *4:48*

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[5] Because I have extensively covered the issue of the explicit open-endedness of Kane's plays in other chapters, I will not go into further detail other than to note that *4:48 Psychosis* poses the same challenges to its potential directors as *Crave* in its openness. As the case is with *Crave*, I do not believe that the original production was meant to be understood as definitive.

Psychosis. The disintegration, or destruction of the whole is final and non-reconstitutive as the character achieves his or her purpose: suicide. It is the ultimate act of destruction for which there is no opportunity for reassembly.

Poggi cites the way in which Cubist artists tended to "subvert the role of the frame and of the pictorial ground" (Poggi xi). This technique is manifest in the theatre as the way in which the role of theatrical space is challenged and transformed. What may seem common now, approximately one hundred years after cubist artists began to play with artistic space, was considered innovative at the time: real objects from the material world were introduced by collage artists. In one of Picasso's often-studied works, "Still Life with Chair-Caning," a hemp rope serves as the frame. In another, "The Letter," a real postage stamp is placed upon a drawing of a letter instead of painting one into the picture. The effect of this technique is that the division between painting and world is blurred. No longer is art simply a rendering or imitation of life contained within the frame or parametres, but includes life. Whereas the traditional role of the artist was to create the illusion of perspective, of depth, of shape and texture, the addition of real life objects or fabrics serves to create a more literal representation. This particular production of *4:48 Psychosis* makes use of this technique. Having said that, I think that it is important to reiterate that the script does not in any way instruct the way in which the director and designer have chosen to present the piece in this production.

A subtle example of this blurring of the division between playing space and world occurs at the end of the play with the line "please open the curtains" (Kane 43). As I mentioned earlier, just before the characters exited the theatrical space, they opened the shutters inside the theatre, which allowed the dark theatre to be flooded with the

midsummer evening light. Additionally, when they opened the windows, sounds from the busy street below filled the silence of the theatre. In this way the designer incorporated real life into the theatrics of the play, and the theatrics of the play into real-life. The outside world signifies within the theatrical space, not as an intrusion but a transition, a continuation of the theatrical world into the "real" world, or the real world into the theatrical world. This last line, and arguably the entire play takes on a very physical reality as this action is performed. There isn't any need for a sound-scape or for the house lights to be turned on. Although the characters have simply exited the playing area there is an unsettling sense that they have walked out onto the street below, just as the audience will do. In doing this, the director has staged the play in a way that implicates the audience and the audience's traditional conception of the real world and the stage world. The two worlds have been collapsed in the act of opening the window and through this destruction (the sum of their destruction) the director has created not so much an alternative realm of existence, as an existence in which a re-assembly of fragments to its original form is impossible. For the audience it is a mode of existence infused with the knowledge that achieving a cohesive whole is impossible. The audience experiences a post-suicide state, a silent numbness.

An even more striking way in which this particular production succeeds in challenging traditional uses of theatrical space by blurring the boundaries between play world and real world, is the way in which the mirror is used to reflect the action. There are a couple of important ways in which this alters the theatrical space, first in the way in which the actual bodies and placement of the actors is concerned and secondly in the way

that the audience in the first several rows can see its own reflection in the mirror and so becomes a conspicuous element of the action.

In this particular production of *4:48 Psychosis*, the viewer is confronted with not only the front of the scene but also the back and sides, at the same instant. MacDonald achieves this multiple-perspective sensation through various techniques; such as, in the opening sequence, placing his characters in supine positions, making it difficult for the audience to see the characters lying on the floor, forcing the audience to rely more on the reflected image, yet asking them to consider both. The visual effect is that of a tableau of people arranged in such a way that is reminiscent of a still life, but with a skewed or irreverent perspective. The characters are simultaneously lying down and standing up, facing the audience and turning their back to it. For every scene there are at least two perspectives, the stage and the reflection. MacDonald capitalizes on this effect, requiring the audience to consider two perspectives simultaneously. Shifting the focus from the actor on the stage to the actor in the mirror is an effect that resembles a Cubist painting most succinctly. However, this effect is not, like its counterparts in Cubist paintings, based purely on aesthetic appeal. It is an intellectual effect, loaded with meaning which aims to present a dilemma to the audience; they are forced to consider at least two sides to every scene, sides that may be in opposition to each other. This occurs on both a literal and a figurative level. Literally, because of the mirror, there are two perspectives. Figuratively, the mirror symbolizes not only the notion that there are also two sides to every story, both of which share the narrative space, and are each deserving of consideration, but also the character's experience of a fractured identity. This duality in

narrative can be found most prominently in the scenes that involve a patient-doctor scenario.

The scene in which the patient and doctor appear to switch roles is an example of this technique: the patient becomes the psychologist in the role of listener and the psychologist becomes the patient, confessing certain feelings to the patient. The patient begins by stating that he/she knows nothing about the doctor. Eventually, the patient succeeds in getting the psychologist to divulge personal information: "Most of my clients want to kill me. When I walk out of here at the end of the day I need to go home to my lover and relax. I need to be with my friends and relax. I need my friends to be really together… I fucking hate this job and I need my friends to be sane" (237). In comparison, the patient suddenly looks quite sane and in control. The therapist has had a mini breakdown and confessed something that should not have been revealed to a patient. More than simply revealing that the psychologist/patient relationship is always in danger of becoming something other, this scene reveals that the patient, the one who is diagnosed, is not necessarily the only one who experiences alienation, an intensity of emotion, or is in need of assurance, comfort, or even therapy. This play is not simply about the madness of a suicidal person; it is also about the people around them. It is composed of a multitude of perspectives.

In addition to the mirror's contribution to achieving an intensity of experience, some very real artistic intentions are at work. The idea of breaking up a figure and presenting it as a non-stationary, non-permanent, and non-fixable entity is clearly an aim of both the Cubist painters' artistic agenda and that of the production of Kane's play. Visually, this helps to reinforce the postmodernist idea that there is no such thing as a

unified subject, an idea that I believe is prevalent in Kane's later work. In the painterly example of this effect, planes of perspective are skewed and the end result is to shake the viewer's notion of artistic reality and, arguably, conventional notions of reality itself.[6] Commonly known examples of this include Picasso's painting of "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," his "Three Musicians," and "Guernica." This effect is Picasso's "sum of destruction," art represented by a destruction of the object into essential fragments and its reassembly. Kane's play's language reinforces the notion of the fractured self. At many points throughout the play, a voice will comment that his/her "body flies apart" (238), or states that his/her "mind is torn apart by lightening" (239).

An interesting twist in the theatrical experience of *4:48 Psychosis* as staged in the original production occurs with the use of the mirror as a design element. When the audience is required to look into the mirror, as mentioned earlier, the first five or six rows of the audience can see themselves as well as the actors in the reflection. This produces a very disconcerting feeling as one sees oneself alongside the actors, transfixed in the character's gaze, and at times appearing to return the gaze. The individual members of the audience experience the intensity of being confronted by the highly suicidal character, as if that character were about to implicate them in the action. I was seated in the third row and at least once I experienced an impulse to flee the theatre due to the intensity of this effect. That impulse arises from the experience of becoming implicated in the action of suicide. In this scenario it is no longer possible that a member of the audience can simply be an anonymous, passive observer. Yet another traditional role of the theatre

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[6] I am reminded of Picasso's painting, "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon." It has been said of "Les Demoiselles" that the women in the painting have an uncanny ability to "transfix [the viewer] with their gaze"; in effect the painting possesses a power through the use of this "gaze" to "stare us down" (Golding 107).

space itself has been subverted: the division between stage and audience has been amalgamated in the mirror, encouraging the audience to consider its responsibility, perhaps as members of society, as witnesses to the events that occur on the stage, and as participants in the play itself.

Although the validity of such categorizations such as high and low culture are questionable and a completely subjective issue, discussions of modernist work often focus on the bringing together of these two realms. I will for the sole purpose of this comparison entertain such categorizations. According to Poggi, Cubist artists sought to emphasize a "link between signs of 'high' art and those of mass culture… establishing a parallel between these previously distinct cultural codes. The resulting works do not celebrate the machine or the popular commodity so much as redefine originality: no longer is it the immediate expression of a unique self, but rather the manipulation of pre-existing conventions and schemas" (Poggi xiii). There are several issues entangled in the above statement that must be unravelled before they can be applied to Kane's play and this production. Distinguishing "high art" from mass culture is problematic, particularly to a postmodern/ postindustrialist sensibility in which such distinctions are considered elitist and are essentially meaningless. The designation of high and low art is also problematic in that it is a highly suspicious means of artificial categorization based more on principles of elitism rather than on artistic evaluation. Perhaps of better use is the second half of Poggi's argument as cited above, in which Poggi highlights the identification of "manipulations of pre-existing schema" that are used to achieve an artistic purpose. The question arises as to whether Kane, like many early modernist and avant-garde writers before her, shares a desire to remain cryptic and therefore produce a

text that is only accessible to a select elite? Is this play the expression of unique self, or, the expression of human commonality and human frailty at its most candid? I have applied this theory to *4:48 Psychosis* centring on Kane's use of language and the identification of from where this language is borrowed, the effect that its invocation has upon members of the audience.

There are three examples in this play of a "manipulation of pre-existing schema," that I would like to examine. The first occurs when one of the voices cries out: " My love, my love, why have you forsaken me" (Kane 219). Here Kane appropriates and reworks the famous biblical phrase. The line echoes the words of Christ's anguish while hanging on the cross. It can be found in almost identical appearance in both the books of Mark and Matthew wherein they report the following: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi Eloi, lamma sabachtani'--'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27: 47). By appropriating this phrase Kane asks the audience to establish a connection between Christ's suffering and the character. The phrase is an expression of despair in the final hour of one's life, in which the speaker realizes that the end is near and that there isn't any hope. In the Bible these words signify that the nails have been fixed, the body is abandoned, death is eminent. In this case death was prophesied, a fore-gone conclusion. Perhaps this is what Kane intended: this line is a signal that this character's fate is already determined no matter what interventions may be put in place or even despite intervention on the part of the psychiatric profession. Once the decision has been made, it is as if the suicide has already been completed. By manipulating words that are already a part of the audience's schema, Kane has eliminated the distinction between what was once considered to be a unique instance of human suffering (Christ's) and the

mundane reality of the masses. Through Kane's appropriation of these words for human concerns, these words become an expression of extreme human despair and loneliness rather than something otherworldly. This appropriation for the human experience is necessary because the experience of the Son of God has proved meaningless for the existential experience of the ordinary person suffering from urban alienation, or from suicidal depression. Given Kane's reportedly adversarial relationship to organized religion, the biblical reference is fraught with controversy; Kroker and Kroker are helpful here. These moments in the play appear to be an example of the edge of violence and decay Kroker and Kroker report in their assessment of postmodernism. The violence that is referred to in Kane's appropriation of the crucifixion scenario is not religious, but perhaps parodic, or at least a way in which to construct a panic scene and a body in panic:

> panic bodies living on (their own) borrowed power; and violent, and alternating, scenes of surplus energy and perfect inertness; existing psychologically on the edge of fantasy and psychosis; floating sign-systems of the body re-experienced in the form of its own second order simulacra; [...] incited less by the language of accumulation than lack; fascinating, because catastrophic, signs of self extermination, self-liquidation, and self-cancellation. (Kroker and Kroker iii)

Furthermore the body and in this case the religious body, or the body in imitation of the religious body is an "inscribed surface onto which are projected all the grisly symptoms of culture burnout" (iv). This religious appropriation makes relevant the individual's experience and moves this pain from the esoteric to the realm of the mundane, from modernistic yearnings for salvation and restoration to postmodern nihilism.

The phrase can also be found in Psalm 22. The opening line reads: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1), expresses the poet's feeling of distance from God. The words evidently were later reworked into the words that Christ spoke in the Passion Narratives of the New Testament. Kane has appropriated the phrase and the meaningful moment of its utterance: a solitary human being, abandoned by his closest friends, in the moment of the discovery of betrayal, crying out in anguish. It is an expression of the disillusionment of one who is on the brink of losing one's faith. Unlike the Psalmist, however, who, despite his sense of despair, maintains faith and hope, Kane's speaker has lost all hope, driven as he or she is toward the gaping nothingness of suicide.

The second example of the manipulation of pre-existing schema is when one of Kane's characters repeatedly shouts: "Look away from me"(227-28). Three examples of this phrase can be found in the Bible. The first two can be found in the Book of Job and the third in Psalm 39. In the first case, Job asks God: "Will you never look away from me, or let me alone for even an instant…for soon I will lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more" (Job 7:19-21). Just prior to speaking these words, Job has expressed his lack of a desire to live:

> When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life. I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning. (Job 7:13-16)

Job's words read as if spoken by a character from Kane's play. This terrible anguish, this lack of a will to live, this perception of being tortured by visions--the joke of an all powerful being--and continuously being judged is neither peculiar nor unfamiliar to Kane. It is in fact as old as humanity itself. Job is expressing his lack of a desire to continue to live, as is Kane's character. To ask that someone look away is to ask that person to deny one's existence. Ironically, it is impossible for the audience to look away from the characters on the stage because of the mirror. Everything and everyone can be seen at all times.

Another example of this phrase can be found when Job asks God to look away from men: "Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired man" (Job 14:6). Ringing through both of these examples is not only anguish but also anger, anger for the lack of sense and order with which his existence is condemned. It is anger for being judged so harshly. In a similar way, Kane's characters are also expressing their anger and disappointment at the failure of the medical system to help their mental illness. They could also be expressing the same anger toward a society that alienates them. When Kane's character commands her audience to "look away," she has just finished listing a string of unspeakable atrocities for which she feels responsible: "I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy, the killing fields are mine" (227). While some mental illnesses are organic in nature, there are many that are created by an individual's response to certain stresses, and the ability of a society to alleviate the stress, or provide the appropriate support for individuals who are suffering. To look away from her would

be an act that allows her to die, while confirming her inexpressible shame. She wakes from the nightmare still speaking the words. It is impossible to look away from this character's pain.

The final occurrence of the phrase is found in Psalm 39 and ends that song on a supreme note of sadness: "Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more" (Psalm 39:13). In this context the speaker is expressing despair for a life that is unbearable. He has given up hope in life and is thinking only of the afterlife. This phrase even suggests that the speaker is asking for her life to be ended. To look away from someone is to disavow the person. Looking away is the opposite of looking, which results in knowledge. It is the opposite of knowing, of witnessing. It is a conscious denial.

Although the use of the preceding phrases cannot help but be reminiscent of the language of the Bible, it is certainly not due to an act of reverence for the Bible that these phrases find their way into this play. In Kane's play these are phrases that have lost religious meaning and impact. These are phrases that have been repeated so often that the original meaning and impact, their weight and importance has long since been lost. Their over usage and misuse has rendered them effectively empty and meaningless discourse. Kane is using them with the knowledge that they are overdetermined and in a way that seeks to make them meaningful.

Another example of Kane's manipulation or consumption of pre-existing schema is the way she invokes the apocalyptic language found in many books of the Bible. The phrase that Kane uses frequently is "and it shall come to pass" (Kane 228). The context within which it is usually found in the Bible is in respect of the prophecy of destruction.

Numerous books from both Testaments contain the phrase. The authority upon which the phrase is used bespeaks of the authority of an all-powerful god. The events it prophesies are irrevocable on that account. By drawing upon that tradition Kane is incorporating the high language of biblical prophecy with the common experience of contemporary humans. Immediately preceding the line in Kane's play is the line: "We are anathema, the pariahs of reason. Why am I stricken? I saw visions of God" (Kane 228). Quite literally this line means: We are the cursed (dedicated to evil), the (hereditary) outcasts of reason. From these lines, I argue that it becomes apparent that the character perceives him/herself as part of a cosmic design in which his/her end is predetermined and therefore outside of control. Suffering is a curse: he/she was born into that curse and it stands against logic and typical existence in this world. It is also an expression of the extreme anguish and alienation that the character is experiencing. There is no one else living on earth that can know what the character is going through. The character is isolated through these feelings, unable to connect with other people. Perhaps the only connection that he/she can feel is with the otherworldly experiences of mythical people during mythical times.

The sentiment is also an expression of the lack of control that he/she feels over his/her life. It is as if his/her body has been overtaken by forces beyond control. Kane constructs the voices' speech as if he/she is acting as a medium for the following message: "Gird yourselves for ye shall be broken in pieces, it shall come to pass [...], and ye shall be driven to darkness. If there is blasting (there shall be blasting) the names of the offenders shall be shouted from the rooftops […] all this shall come to pass, all the words of my noisome breath […] We are the abjects who depose our leaders and burn incense unto Baal" (229). This section of the play is the most obvious example of the

Kane's reliance upon patterns in pre-existing schema. It reads as a collage of biblical language, themes, and references. She brings together the language of prophecy, as discussed above, with the language of the apocalyptic visions, complete with reference to worshipping Baal, which is loaded with biblical significance: "And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth" (Judges 2:13). I argue that this is the reason that Kane's characters are "abjects" (Kane 229) or fallen outcasts. I believe the character perceives herself to be in opposition to the social harmony that others experience. She has decided that she is destined through birth, determined through fate and confirmed through deed to have no other choice in life but to commit suicide. This is the emotional experience, the exposure of the internal character. I contend that these words are not the expression of what the doctors know or can explain; they are not simply the symptom of madness. This is the driving force within the character's emotional landscape, within which her body has become a battleground of sorts, a place of reckoning between, and expression of, conflicting forces. Perhaps the forces at odds can be understood as good and evil, but they are more accurately identified as social and anti-social, a set of conflicting feelings that people experience when they feel like they should be a part of a group and yet are not. This is urban alienation--the desire to be a part of a social group and lacking access to a group with which to belong.

The character/consciousness in this scenario is also an instance of Kristeva's abject. Because the play is structured with complex and contradictory human desires, I feel it is entirely appropriate to invoke Kristeva's notion of the abject in relation to Kane's play. In *Powers of Horror*, the abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between

subject and object or between self and other. The abject, "radically excluded" as it is from meaning, "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (4). As neither object nor subject, the abject is always "something that I do not recognize as a thing" (2). In Kane's play the presence of the abject could be located in any instance in which something uncanny, and loathsome "harries" (2):

> But I am not here and never have been. Dr This writes it down and Dr That attempts a sympathetic murmur. Watching me, judging me, smelling the crippling failure oozing from my skin, my desperation clawing and all-consuming panic drenching me as I gape in horror at the world and wonder why everyone is smiling and looking at me with secret knowledge of my aching shame. (Kane 209)

This is an example of Kane's abject figure who is experiencing a turning inside out, a loss of definition of borders and boundaries; this is a figure in confrontation with his/her corpse. The horror that the figure experiences is a reaction to his/her outer experience, but is also a horror of the self, the "oozing," "shameful" self. Furthermore, "drinking bitter black coffee I catch that medicinal smell in an ancient tobacco and something touches me in that still sobbing place and a wound from two years ago opens like a cadaver and a long buried shame roars it foul decaying head" (208-09). Any border that has been established is clearly threatened in this current state of existence; the threat deploys the body, now divorced from any "objective reality in which my body and mind are one" (209), toward a suicide, which I read as a perverse attempt to reunite the disparate, violating, border-defying self. Finally, this figure experiences the breakdown of meaning, an experience in which the figure beholds his or her own "Eunuch of castrated

thought" (242), a moment in which absurdly and grotesquely "the chicken's still dancing/ the chicken won't stop" (243). The final image of the suicide of the abject subject is not a romantic notion of the beautiful or sublime human subject, but rather there is "vanish[ment]" (244), and finally nothing but dead space, air, dim light and silence.

Kane portrays an experience imbued with epistemological importance, which coupled with the production's appropriation of Cubist concerns, renders it a visually modernist play. According to McHale, modernist literature foregrounds exactly these epistemological issues, "questions such as [...] 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (McHale 9). In *4:48 Psychosis* Kane's characters grapple with concerns regarding knowledge and its limits, another pre-occupation of modernist writing:

> "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of knowledge and so on" (9).

McHale also describes, lending support to my argument regarding the similarity between this production and Cubist/modernist aesthetics, such devices as the use of a "multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives," coupled with the tendency to "transfer the epistemological difficulties of its characters to its readers," to create "a dislocated chronology," in which, "withheld or indirectly presented information [...] simulate for the reader [...] problems of accessibility, reliability, and limitation of knowledge" (9-10). The following examples will serve to demonstrate how Kane's script foregrounds

epistemological concerns, supporting my argument regarding the similarity between this production and modernist aesthetics.

As one character succinctly states, "I shake without reason and have nothing to say about my 'illness' which anyway amounts only to knowing that there's no point in anything because I am going to die" (Kane 209). Aside from the obvious existential crisis this character is experiencing, this line is not only an expression of despair regarding the incurability of her mental illness, but also an expression of despair regarding existential knowledge. This despair suggests an awareness of the limits of the psychiatric profession to cure the 'illness' that this character knows will be the death of her. Furthermore, Kane attacks the scientific community's claim to "objective reality"(209) through her description of the doctors' actions: "Inscrutable doctors, sensible doctors, way-out doctors, doctors you'd think were fucking patients if you weren't shown proof otherwise, ask the same questions, put words in my mouth, offer chemical cures for congenital anguish and cover each other's arses" (209). This may be an expression of mental illness but it is also an expression of a crisis between the doctor-patient relationship and ultimately of the medical profession, and a crisis of knowledge. It is spoken with the lucidity of a person who has partaken in a quest for knowledge, and that quest has resulted, not in a discovery of what her place in this world is to be, but in the discovery that the limit of knowledge is a very frightening brink upon which to be situated. For this character, it is the end of naïveté. Prior to the act of suicide, the doctors are at as much of a loss as to what should be done as the patient. This is a world in which there is no answer that can save this individual; there is no salvation or assurance that there is a

unified theory of the world that can offer hope for a unification of the self. From Kane's perspective, the only solution to the crisis, or escape from it, is depicted as suicide.

Later in this monologue the character reaches the definitive point of discovery that his/her doctor has betrayed her: "And while I was believing you were different and that you maybe even felt the distress that sometimes flickered across your face and threatened to erupt you were covering your arse too [...] To my mind that is betrayal [...] and nothing can restore my faith" (210). This declaration suggests that the expression of the ultimate loss in faith, the end of innocence, is an expression that accords with the modernist realization of "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Abrams "Modernism" 119).

If epistemological themes can be said to be dominant in modernist texts then Kane's text should feel at home beside other works of art from the period. The problem of unknowability runs rampant in the play made manifest in the sheer number of questions that the characters ask of the audience throughout. "How can I return to form now my formal thought has gone"(213) is a perfect example of the type of questioning Kane's characters express throughout the play. And yet despite its modernist tendencies the play does not resolve itself except in the act of suicide, which is hardly a resolution reached through knowledge. There is no moment of reassembly of the fragments of the self in the play; there is a lack that renders the text ultimately a postmodern piece, in keeping with the entirety of Kane's oeuvre. The act of suicides marks a shift toward ontological concerns, and places Kane's play within a postmodernist tradition, despite its Cubist and modernist tendencies. As McHale argues: "Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push

epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions" (11). In *4:48 Psychosis*, Kane provides a postmodern answer to such questions, as posed by McHale after Higgins, as "What happens when different kinds of worlds are place in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10). When worlds, and identity, or selves, are confronted by various stimuli, or violated, the world becomes an inner landscape of shifting centres; consciousness becomes plural, and simultaneously cancelled. In answer to Dick Higgins's question "'post-cognitive' question [...] 'What is to be done in [this world]'" (McHale 10), Kane suggests that the answer to such feelings as "the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve" (Kane 206), to the endless boredom and dissatisfaction (206), and the realization that she/he is "a complete failure as a person/guilty, [she is] being punished/ [she] would like to kill herself" (206) is suicidal nihilism.

The will toward suicide and the finality of the fragmentation suggest what I have already alluded to: Kroker, Kroker and Cook's notion of the postmodern cancelled identity.[7] In discussing Nietzsche, Kroker and Cook offer the following regarding nihilistic mood of the postmodern scene:

> we are living on the violent edge between ecstasy and decay; between the melancholy lament of postmodernism over the death of the grand signifiers of modernity--consciousness, truth, sex, capital, power--and the ecstatic nihilism of ultramodernism; between the body as a torture chamber and pleasure-palace; between fascination and lament. But this is not to say that postmodernism comes directly out of the bleeding tissues of

[7]Modernists also looked to Nietszche's writings for understanding of the modern world; Thomas Mann, Eugene O'Neil, and Bertrand Russell are examples of such writers.

> the body--out of the body's fateful oscillation between the finality of 'time's it was' (the body as death trap) and the possibility of experiencing the body (*au-delà* of Nietzsche) as a 'solar system'--a dancing star yes, but also a black hole--which is the source of hyper-nihilism of the flesh of the postmodern kind. (10)

Certainly, the figure in *4:48 Psychosis* is a fraught site of torture and pleasure. But it is a twisted, perverse pleasure that is unfamiliar, controversial and violent. It is the pleasure of dismantling the psyche, and pleasure tainted by the torture of " never hav[ing] met" (245) oneself, because the "face is pasted on the underside of [the] mind" (245). It is a figure that is "drown[ing] in dysphoria" (213), and what is more postmodern than dysphoria, which can be both a visual impairment and a perversity of intellectual perception? At this moment this figure is Nietzsche's "suicidal nihilist." It is someone who has

> sought 'meaning' in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long waste of strength, the agony of the 'in vain', insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure--being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had deceived oneself all too long. (Nietzsche 12).

In *4:48 Psychosis*, this is the exhausted figure who has "resigned [it]self to death this year," for whom "some will know the simple fact of pain" (Kane 208).

In *4:48 Psychosis*, the notion of trauma is inherent in the character or consciousness' necessity of suicide. Unlike Kane's earlier work, which features episodes of trauma such as rape, mutilation, war, and suicide, this play is trauma itself. If all the

other plays can be said to be specific portrayals of how the postmodern experience is essentially a traumatic one, *4:48 Psychosis* is a portrayal of what it is like to be in a state of trauma. It is the study of the individual's experience with trauma, rather than societal breakdown as a result of social trauma. It is a portrayal of the helplessness of the trauma victim and that victim's own simultaneous desire to retaliate, crumble or disappear under the circumstances. It is the simultaneous desire to "achieve goals and ambitions [...] overcome obstacles and attain a high standard [...] to belong [...] to be accepted" (233-4), and the sensation that one is the "child of negation [...] out of one torture chamber into another a vile succession of errors without remission" (239). Kane's play is a well of darkness; the voice of *4:48 Psychosis* is inconsolable. As this line indicates, this path of madness is without "remission."

4:48 Psychosis is both the expression of a disquietude toward the form of drama and many concerns of modern and postmodern existence. Breaking with the traditional format of a playscript, Kane dispensed with the necessity of characters, opting instead to use a consciousness that could easily be male or female, young or old, homosexual or heterosexual. The original production of *4:48 Psychosis* used many techniques I believe to be drawn from Cubist art forms, in order to represent visually the play's fragmented subject from a variety of perspectives in a disorienting and provocative manner. The play is a study and presentation of the process of depression as it leads to suicide. Kane's earlier work, focussed on society, was to be understood as hopeful, despite the tragedy of their endings. However, *4:48 Psychosis* is devoid of hope; at its conclusion it indicates the definitive disintegration of the postmodern aesthetic subject. *4:48 Psychosis* suggests that there is in fact no hope, and that the only escape from the banality of life, the

repetitiveness of pain, loss and depression is through suicide. To my mind, this nominates *4:48 Psychosis* the most shocking play of her oeuvre. It is more shocking to witness the proposal that there is no answer other than suicide, than graphic depictions of society as violent, sexist and racist, or face that institutions such as the Church and government are corrupt. If this is Kane's final message to the world, it is a very bleak view of humanity. It is a nihilistic view that has lost all hope and, arguably, has even lost the desire to effect social change.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

> The Pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the ideas I do. (Roland Barthes *Pleasure of the Text* 99)

In Chapter Two I referred to Kane's own commentary that her play is "'not violent. It is quite a peaceful play'" (Woddis). I broadly apply this comment to pertain not only to *Blasted*, but as the overriding sentiment of Kane's entire oeuvre and propose that rather than experiencing shock (because after all, according to Kane, her plays are no more shocking than falling down the stairs) the reader should take a certain pleasure in the text. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes muses that the "text of bliss" is the "text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (98). Certainly, Kane's plays might be nominated "texts of bliss" for their own peculiar modes of discomfort, unsettling action and most importantly the state of loss that Barthes describes, and that in Kane's plays becomes nihilism.[1] Additionally, Barthes poses the question: "Does the text have a human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body?" (99). Barthes concludes that the pleasure of the text is irreducible to "physiological need" (99); rather, the text seems to be contingent upon, and necessitated by, physiological

[1] I don't think it would be unreasonable to suggest that in postmodernism, and certainly postmodernism as expressed by Kane's theatre, pain and pleasure can in fact be synonymous *and* antithetical to each other.

experience. The textual bodies that I have studied in Kane, which as plays arguably do have a human form, look something like a catalogue of bodily horrors: raped bodies, cut bodies, disembowelled bodies, eyes-gouged out, brains blown out, and castrated bodies, excreting and cannibalistic bodies, and finally the missing, suicided bodies of Kroker's and Cook's cancelled identities. Although Kane's work may represent only a fraction of the plethora of theatre produced in Britain, I believe that work is central in its exemplification of the theatrical trends in new theatre during the 1990's there. Kane's bliss seems as peculiar and forbidden as Barthes', but much much darker than he may have envisioned it could be.

Other playwrights have followed in her footsteps: Mark Ravenhill and Rebecca Prichard, for example, have risen to the challenge of Kane's provocative theatre. Other writers such as Jeremy Weller are also challenging theatrical norms by integrating, perhaps in a more self-consciously intentional manner, social concern and action, while retaining Kane's explosive, implosive and challenging methods. When themes of social and sexual violence are staged in Kane's frank and violating manner the themes, motifs, brash language and images are haunting and effective in stirring not only controversy, but dialogue, discussion and a re-evaluation of society. The implications of Kane's plays and their underlying themes are vast. They seem to be positioned in such a way as to provoke reconsideration of culture and society, and to demand that prevalent understandings of modern culture be re-examined, or more radically, the plays implicitly demand a dismantling of existing social assumptions.

Kane's plays are more than the arrangement of words into dialogue and bodies into action. In fact rather than perpetuate illusion within her stagings, Kane forcibly and

persuasively breaks with deceiving, theatrical intent. McHale is enlightening on this postmodern trend:

> Postmodernist fiction is above all illusion-breaking art; it systematically disturbs the air of reality by foregrounding the ontological structure of texts and of fictional worlds. It foregrounds precisely what Gardner insists must stay in the background if fiction is to be moral. (221)[2]

McHale elaborates:

> this is the difference between experiencing fiction as a dream unfolding in the mind, and experiencing it as the moment of wakening from the dream into reality, or the moment of slipping from reality into dream; or the experience of being aware that you are dreaming in the midst of the dream itself, while you are dreaming it. (221)

Indeed, Kane's plays, in radical and violent fashion, foreground the necessity of awakening, even if it is a rude awakening, to certain extreme realities that she believed were in need of scrutiny.

McHale also foregrounds by way of his own concluding remarks, what he considers to be two recurrent themes in postmodern literature, and certainly they are consistently present in all of Kane's work presented in this study: love and death.[3] McHale proposes the following: "Love… involves violations of ontological boundaries"

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[2] Here McHale is referring to beliefs prevalently held by critics and writers such as John Gardner, Gerald Graff, and Charles Newman that postmodernist art is "morally bad art, and tends to corrupt its readers. It does so by denying external, objective reality [and] nowadays everything in our culture tends to deny reality and promote unreality, in the interests of maintaining high levels of consumption" (220).

(222); as he describes it, these violations are "seductive" and "erotic." Postmodern texts do not simply write about love, or explore love as a theme (227); rather according to McHale, postmodernist writing is a "modeling of erotic relations through foregrounded violations of ontological boundaries… love is a *meta*object… it characterizes not the fictional interactions in the text's world, but rather the interactions between the text and its world on the one hand, and the reader and his or her world on the other" (227). The same can be said to be true about death in postmodern writing: it too is "universal" (232). McHale explains: "foregrounding ontological boundaries is a means for foregrounding death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way" (231). I would argue that despite the prevalence of these two themes in postmodernist fiction, and in spite of their new foregrounded, privileged positions, the process that McHale delineates is also a neutralizing process.

I contend that while it is clear that Kane's work is a participant in postmodernist art and aesthetics, she has also "blasted" some of the boundaries of postmodernist art. In her work neither love nor death are neutral principles. In Kane's plays, love and its partner eroticism are related to rape, murder, bodily harm, and abuse; love is linked to death through violence, murder and suicide. If Kane's plays possess an erotic relationship with the reader or audience, as McHale proposes in his summary, then the relationship is violently erotic, or more simply and accurately, purely violent. It appears that Kane's plays are defining a new standard of the postmodern in theatre.

The plays in question present new challenges to reading and understanding theatre

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[3] However, arguably, love and death are recurrent themes in literature in general, the manner in which love and death relate to each other are perhaps of greater significance.

and, consequently, culture, despite the dark, nihilistic conclusions. I have argued throughout my dissertation that, despite the plays' appearance of gratuitous violence and an adolescent desire to shock her audiences, Kane is, in fact, making some very important statements about the state of British society. In *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* a moral lesson is found in the undercurrent of the enacted atrocities: traditional and detrimental ways of thinking about sexuality, gender, power, government and human relations need to be examined and dismantled. However, as Kane presents them, they are not typical moral lessons; these plays do not sloganize or preach, nor do they offer any suggestions as to how things should be. In fact, they portray countless immoralities, revelling in a theatre of cruelty that seeks to overturn "all our preconceptions" (Artaud 84). These plays enact the annihilation of an old social order founded on an outmoded, patriarchally-dominated morality that is responsible for the oppression of certain groups of people and the maintenance of power for others. I argue that the hope that can be found within these two plays is located in their ability to teach peace, tolerance and non-violence through the staging and enactment of violence. Whether this hope will be borne into action is not a concern in these plays; that is up to the audience to decide and enact.

In Kane's later work, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* Kane presents a bleaker view of the potential for healing and peace than in either *Blasted* or *Phaedra's Love*. *Crave*'s characters are caught in a repetitive loop of remembering trauma and of attempting to reconcile that trauma so that they can be released from the cycle. The initial murmuring of suicide as a solution to the postmodern dilemma can also be detected within *Crave*. *4:48 Psychosis* is the dramatized study of depression leading to suicide. As the play exhibiting the least optimism, and due to its unfortunate proximity to the author's own

suicide, *4:48 Psychosis* is a play that is in danger of being read autobiographically. It should emphatically not be read as an elaborate suicide note, but rather an elaborate study of suicide and nihilistic despair.

It remains to be seen how far-reaching Kane's dramatic and theatrical offerings will be; it is my contention that her plays, and the works of others who have sought to construct theatre as challenging and truthful as her theatre seeks to be, will profoundly alter the face of British theatre in this era.

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Appendix

Constructing Kane's biography has proven to be a surprisingly difficult task. In Kane's last instructions to her friends and family, she requested that there be "no biographies" (Hattenstone 29). During the summer of 2000, due to the grief and loyalty that shrouds those who knew her and worked with her, no one wanted to contribute to the inevitable mythmaking of her life and person. While in London for the production of *4:48 Psychosis* in June 2000, I was met with polite resistance from Kane's former colleagues when I made any attempt to discuss the author or her work. Consequently, her biography, in my thesis, remains a collage of fragments culled from the print media of London's dailies, and other such unverified anecdotes. There continues to be an aura of that which is unspeakable surrounding her as a subject. I do not want to contribute here to any act of literary mythmaking. However, I believe that Kane needs to be fastened to her work and, more importantly, to the context from which her work appeared.

Sarah Kane's short and intense life in many ways suggestively mirrors her body of work that encapsulates a particular experience in late twentieth-century Britain. Kane was born on February 3, 1971 (Gardner), and she hanged herself on February 23, 1999, three days after a previous attempt to overdose using a nearly lethal quantity of anti-depressants and sleeping pills. The coroner at the inquest declared that Kane had taken her own life while "'plagued with mental anguish and tormented by thoughts of suicide'" ("Anguish"). Apparently the coroner thought that that statement might explain and give some consolation as to why an intelligent, talented and successful writer would intentionally extinguish herself. She was 28 years old. Her posthumously performed play

entitled *4:48 Psychosis*, which refers to the hour of the morning when the "pain of mental anguish is said to be at its most extreme," ("Posthumous") is reputed to be a reworking of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.[1] This play's subject matter is sadly symptomatic of the author's life because it is a study of suicide. I would argue that suicide as dramatic theme and the manner of the author's death are an unfortunate coincidence, as I fear the suicidal subject matter of *4:48 Psychosis* will inevitably, in some people's minds, simplistically serve to explain the playwright's complicated oeuvre. Worse, *4:48 Psychosis* is at risk of becoming her autobiography. While acknowledging that Kane most certainly and admittedly suffered from depressive illnesses for at least ten years of her life ("Playwright"), I would advise that care should be taken not to reduce her work to the diaries of a mad woman, as simply the articulate ravings of a mentally unstable individual. This biographical essentialism would side-step her committed textuality in all its challenges through (and to) theatrical convention, language, characterization, gender, desire, genre and subjectivity.

Kane's academic record attests to her formidable intellectual character: "Kane graduated with a first from Bristol and went straight on to David Edgar's playwriting MA at Birmingham University [...] She went to university wanting to be an actress. She then realised that actors were powerless, so she decided to direct. She then realised that there was hardly anything she wanted to direct, so she began to write" (Hattenstone 29). However, according to classmate and friend Vincent O'Connell, "'she hated the course,

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[1] "The Actor's Touring Company asked Kane to write a play based on Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Werther was a fictional hero who killed himself for love. He became the ultimate romantic icon, and after Goethe published the story,a spate of copycat suicides followed. Kane said that she was already working on *4:48 Psychosis*, - and that there were parallels." (Hattenstone 34).

felt stymied by it [and] she completed the course only to please her mother'" (29). Based on the information gathered thus far, Kane displayed a tendency for contradictions; on the one hand, she was professionally ambitious, on the other it seems she was simply the dutiful daughter, wanting only to please her parents.

I see the biography of her life as fragmentary: encounters with people, reported and recorded moments, and subjective experience.[2] Throw-away details such as, she smoked "Camel Lights" and that she was "vegetarian… but still ha[d] fantasies about meat, bacon rolls especially," (McGlone) have been recorded and preserved in various journals and interviews.

She was also reputed to be a "fanatical football supporter and said most of the time she would rather go to Old Trafford, Manchester United's 'Theatre of Dreams,' than the theatre itself" (Gibbons).

At the time of writing this thesis there is a distinct lack of published interviews about her creative process or her theory of contemporary theatre. This conspicuous gap is not merely a wilful critical blindspot, but the result of the aphasia surrounding Kane, indeed, actively produced by Kane: she resisted labels and consequently identification as belonging to one group or another, sex, gender or otherwise. Yet, it seems that in her art, identity was important to her and she was aware of the power of identity, so much so that

[2] Most of what has been recorded in the print media is anecdotes from friends and colleagues, and worse is presented, unverifiably by journalists in reviews of Kane's plays, and in my opinion inevitably represents a very narrow view of Kane's life in words.

at one time, early in her career, she used a pseudonym, Marie Kelvedon. In Kane's later work she plays with notions of identity within the scripts themselves.

One significant aspect of her known life reveals that according to friend and playwright David Grieg, he "'and Kane were part of an intimate circle of gothic miserablists, student clichés really [...] they listened to Joy Division, dressed in black, raged against the slaughter in the Balkans [...] They shared a slightly depressive outlook [...] shared an enjoyment of the darker things--a post-adolescent dwelling on the question of life'" (Hattenstone 29). However, Grieg is quick to qualify this by remarking that "'Sarah was really very gentle. Really, really gentle. Very kind'" (29), in an illogical attempt to dispel any stereotypical connection between that "slightly depressive" British youth culture to which Kane belonged and her eventual suicide. Many contradictions and curiosities both frustrate and contribute to the understanding of Kane's intellectual and emotional complexity. "Paradox" is a term that friends and acquaintances use in describing Kane. As Grieg declares, "'Funny, empathetic, huge-hearted. She was gifted at living, more than anyone I've known. She had a massive appetite for life [...] I know it's a paradox'" (29). This separation between the playwright's youth and her vocation also implies that the violent nature and subject of her plays need not be regarded as responsible for her suicide.

Other fragments of information offer a glimpse of Kane's commitment to her vocation, albeit in an anecdotal manner. For example, while still in University, Kane apparently "applied for the assistant director job at the Bush [theatre]... she sent in a four page essay about the future of British theatre and hence the world... occasionally she would appear at the Bush, go in to see a show, then walk out at half-time. Instead of the

usual discreet slipping away with head lowered, Sarah would sit on the stairs and lecture the theatre staff and anyone hanging around, including on one occasion the actors waiting to make their entrances in the second half, on what was wrong with the show" (Dromgoole 161-2). Obviously, Kane had a specific agenda and theory of aesthetics that she felt very strongly about, and which was not being fulfilled by the majority of theatre offered in London at this time. Based on the anecdotal evidence suggested by Kane's "four page essay about the future of British theatre and hence the world," Kane viewed theatre as a vehicle through which social criticism could be disseminated. While this is hardly a new concept, the desire to effect social change places Kane within a long tradition of socially activist playwrights, and provides a basis for the argument that through her art Kane consciously sought to effect social change.

Theatre critics in London's daily newspapers were quick to seize upon Kane's possible religious affiliations as a potential source that might provide the key to understanding much of her work. Critics made statements such as "she was a Christian until she was 17" (Hoppen). Other attempts to explain her work had also been based on her past religious affiliation. "Learning that she was a fervent, born again, Christian until the age of 17 comes as no surprise when faced with the complete conviction of her writing: there is no room for doubt" (Benedict). Another critic attempts to reduce her work to the ranting of a religious fanatic with this simplistic explanation: "She was a born-again Christian and subsequently lost her faith, which is perhaps all the explanation one needs for her obsessively apocalyptic view" (Spencer). Undoubtedly, Kane's adversarial relationship to religion is seductive for both those wanting sincerely to gain a

deeper appreciation for her work, and those wishing to discredit Kane's plays as suspect because they are the product of a cult/religious fanatic turned anti-religious amoralist.

Kane is uncharacteristically vocal on the role of religion in her life. In two interviews, she openly discusses her religious past. In one, she ascribes it as "'the full spirit-filled, born again lunacy' and railed against the naivety of her religious years" (Hattenstone 29). In another, she simply states: "'I was a fervent born-again Christian until I was about 17,'" but continues to elaborate the effect it had upon her. "'It's [the Bible] full of rape, mutilation, war and pestilence. I think because of the way I was brought up it has created a dilemma in my head about when life begins and ends. And what hope really is'" (McGlone). Kane abandoned her religious upbringing and "became an atheist, her writing fired by the cruelties carried out in the name of God. 'God the bastard' was one of her favourite Beckett quotes" (Hattenstone 29). Predictably, Kane was either emotionally or psychologically scarred by her involvement in a "born-again" congregation. Her experience, her knowledge of the Biblical tradition is an important biographical fact as evidenced by her effective use of images and allusions to the Bible in her writing. Due to her personal relationship with religion, the impact of Biblical literature inspired, directly and indirectly, the works that Kane produced. Her examination of violence, possibly raised by the inherent contradictions in the Bible, and the dilemma this posed for Kane, combined with the Bible's often extreme and seemingly unnecessary violence, shaped her sustained inquiry into the state of human affairs today. I propose that her plays are violent because they are based upon a global tradition of violence, and specifically influenced by Western European culture, as depicted in the culture's own foundational texts. While the cause and effect relationship is not

necessarily so simple and direct, I think that for Kane, and her desperate desire to depict a society in disarray and chaos, it may have been that simple.

After writing *Crave*, Kane "went into a vicious depression and admitted herself to the Maudsley Hospital in South London. She took anti-depressants, reluctantly [According to Mel Kenyon] 'because they numbed her response to the world'" (Hattenstone 33). It was probably not her writing that lead to her depression, nor was it likely her depression that drove her to write, but rather her keen perception of the world that drove her to write. Obviously, Kane relied heavily on her keen, indeed acrid and hypersensitive, response to the world for her writing and was reluctant to dull her perception with the medication. She was not afraid to delve into the darker corners of her imagination. As Kane told one critic: "you have to go to hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality" (McGlone). In her art, Kane takes her audience through a variety of hellish experiences, unrelentingly, and unapologetically.

When Kane stated in her last wishes that there be "'no biographies,'" her reasoning may have been motivated by what Grieg assesses as her resistance to identificatory labels: "'she hated labels, especially those that defined her by gender or sexuality'" (Hattenstone 29). As woman, and lesbian, in a predominantly male professional environment, Kane's fear of being reduced to a specific label is a valid concern, despite being contrary to contemporary concerns of identity politics that often seeks to foreground difference such as sex and gender. According to many of her own statements, Kane probably would have resisted being labelled as a lesbian writer. She certainly did not use the label as a political means for attention or legitimation of her work. Additionally, she stated that she did not want to be referred to as a woman writer.

In an interview she asserts that she didn't "'believe there is such a thing. When people talk about me as a writer, that's what I am, and that's how I want my work to be judged--on its quality, not on the basis of my age, gender, class, sexuality or race. I don't want to be a representative of any social or biological group of which I happen to be a member'" (Stephenson and Langridge134-5). Her brother, Simon Kane, adds to this sentiment: "'What she wanted to leave behind was her work. That's all Sarah was interested in people seeing [...] Sarah was a very private person'" (Hattenstone 29). Despite her insistence that her gender was irrelevant, Kane made gender a recurrent issue of her work. Additionally, sexual orientation and gender identity pose an issue in many of her plays. In her own life, being sensitive to the issues of sexual orientation, and gender identification, Kane contemplated the idea that gender and sexual identification may have impeded her success, or contributed to the type of critical reaction her work received. "'I have sometimes wondered what the reaction would be if I wrote a play under a male pseudonym. Perhaps I could write a big commercial hit like *Art*and when everyone gave it great reviews I'd reveal who I was'" (McGlone "Nice").[3] This articulated desire to play a game of hiding and revealing complicates Kane's own sense of this identity politics of authorship. Furthermore, fantasies that allude to altering her gender

[3] Perhaps this is not the best example Kane could have found since it was also written by a woman. Or, it is the best example because it reinforces the possibility that a woman can write a big theatrical hit. The subject matter of the play, however, deals exclusively with issues of male friendship, differing values amoung male friends, and different financial, cultural and psychological appraisals of a single work of art, a painting that may or may not be a painting.

identification suggest that Kane adheres to Butler's notion that indeed gender is performative despite Kane's own resistance to gender labels.[4]

But it is exactly at this point of the artist's desire to resist social identity that the danger of mythmaking resides. This possibility has not gone unnoticed by friends and family. As Hattenstone observes, "there does seem to be a danger in being over-protective towards Sarah; that in cocooning her, Simon Kane is doing the very thing he is hoping to prevent: mythologizing her, imputing something grander, more noble, to her despair than mere depression" (34). Others have been more concerned that the facts of her life, including a history of mental illness, depressive episodes, and homosexuality, all represented in scant yet sensational details, will be used to "explain the life, regard it [her body of work] as a serialised suicide note. Or, even worse, we use the life to explain the work" (26). Director James Macdonald expressed similar concerns during preparations for production of her posthumously produced *4:48 Psychosis*: "'I suppose I am wary of her death creating the possibility of people looking at her work in the wrong way'. He compares her to Sylvia Plath, and says just look at the way that her life is always refracted through the prism of suicide" (29). Already the act of mythologizing has inevitably begun, despite the best of intentions amongst some of her closest friends and her agent Mel Kenyon to prevent it: "'I don't think she was depressed, I think it was deeper than that. I think she felt something more like existential despair which is what makes artists tick'" (Gentleman). In the attempt to honour the poet, these misinformed

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[4] Here I am referring to Judith Bulter's basic premise in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* that gender is imposed as a part of the process of "boying" or "girling" a child from birth, as a result of performatives that stipulate how sex is culturally inscribed with prescribed gender attributes.

acts that aggrandise the suicide ignore the stark reality of mental illness. Perhaps this is an honest way for people that were close to Kane to alleviate survivor guilt, absolve themselves of responsibility for her death, decrease the shame that they might feel because they had no idea of the depth of Kane's sorrow or the extremity of her illness. Between the art and the poet's mental stability, there is a chasm of silence, of unknowns.[5] I realize that any attempt at discussing Kane's work is imbued with the near impossibility of avoiding her suicide. Yet one must guard against the temptation to read her own suicide into her theatrical work.

[5] I am aware that I am also in danger of contributing to the mythologizing of Kane's life through asserting that there are mysterious gaps and chasms that potentially provide the key to understanding not simply the author, but also her work.